



TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

## BOOKS BY G. B. STERN

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A LION IN THE GARDEN

THE YOUNG MATRIARCH

THE REASONABLE SHORES

# TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

*By*

G. B. STERN



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*For*  
SONIA LANGMORE

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. . . The title of my book doth promise much, the volume, you see, is very little; and sithens I can not beare out of my follie by authoritie, like an Emperour, I will crave pardon for my Phrenzie, by submission, as your woorshippes too commaunde. The Schoole which I builde, is narrowe, and at the firste blushe appeareth but a doggehole; yet small Cloudes carie water; slender threedes sowe sure stitches; little heares have their shadowes; blunt stone whette knives; from hard rockes flowe soft springes; the whole worlde is drawen in a mappe; Homers Iliades in a nutte shell; a Kings picture in a pennie. Little Chestes may hold greate Treasure; a fewe Cyphers contayne the substance of a rich Merchant. The shortest Pamphlette maye shrowde matter. The hardest heade may give light, and the harshest penne maye sette downe somewhat woorth the reading.

Hee that hath bin shooke with a fierce ague, giveth good counsell to his friends when he is wel. When Ovid had roaved long on the Sea of wantonnesse, hee became a good Pilot to all that followed, and printed a carde of everie daunger . . .

Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579).

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## CHAPTER I

### THE ROPE-WALK

WHENEVER I come out into the Rope-Walk, now that I have returned from the Berkshire Downs to London, I always glance pensively towards my former abode; for I have not long been back, and it still seems queer to be coming out by another door on the ground floor half-way along the roofed alley, and to see an only too significant blank space high up on the second floor where my old rooms had been at the Burlington Gardens end of Albany.

And suddenly it occurred to me for the first time on a special amber afternoon of late November, 1942, that the Military Tailors had also a point of view. Literally a point of view; they had occupied the building opposite; from my sitting-room I had been able to see straight down over the roofs of what has now strangely become the open prairies of Savile Row and Conduit Street; but from my bedroom window the view was blocked by what film idiom would call a close-up of dark squatting little silhouettes, illustrations from Brothers Grimm and Hans Andersen, busily at work on their military tailoring; frogs and epaulettes and gold braid displayed during the years of levées and parades and other suave peace-time occasions. And I used to wish that something would happen, something quite harmless, naturally, to remove the Military Tailors and leave me a wider view. *How* I used to wish it! It would have to be something, I realized, in the nature of a miracle, a sort of Arabian Nights performance of a more than usually intelligent Green Djinn, by which the whole building could suddenly be lifted up and whisked away and set down softly as velvet on velvet, in the suburbs of Baghdad or on the road to Samarkand. I need not even see it happen; one morning, pulling aside the curtains, the building opposite would not be there, and I should have my unremorseful view.

Yes, that was what I wished, for about eight years. And then one morning, on the morning of October 15th, 1940, to be exact, the Military Tailors drew aside *their* curtains, and *my* rooms were not there, and instead, they had a heavenly outlook; at least, they would have when the rubbish and ash and bits of gutted wall were cleared away. It was almost the same thing, you see; the Green Djinn had got it as nearly right as could be expected

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from Djinn; only it had not struck me, and I am afraid did not strike me till two years later and on this afternoon of November, 1942, that the Military Tailors might also have been doing a bit of intensive wishing, and that they were better at it than myself.

On the whole I was glad, though my benevolence functioned a little ruefully. It was nice for the Military Tailors that an ill mind had blown somebody some good, even if that was not exactly the Luftwaffe's original intention.

This was the miracle November when luck suddenly swung round in our direction, and every morning sped us a silver News Bulletin, not news of lead and iron as had been grimly endured for so long; the November of ardent autumn weather, when we all walked lightly as though going forth to celebrate, and spoke spontaneously to strangers; yet remembered from time to time that good tidings were still young and very precarious, and must not be handled carelessly like a child's toy. Before moving back to Albany, I had lived out of London ever since the night which gave the tailors their astonishing panorama. It was fun once more to be in London's heart and centre, yet strolling along the quiet Rope-Walk with the sun in luminous stripes across my feet and across the neat tub and hedge and gravel gardens on either side, during this absurd irrelevant autumn which felt like April . . .

"Now grimy April comes again,  
Maketh bloom the fire-escapes,  
Maketh silvers in the rain,  
Maketh winter coats and capes  
Suddenly all worn and shabby,  
Like the fur of winter bears,  
Maketh kittens, maketh baby,  
Maketh kissing on the stairs . . .  
Maketh ticklings down the back,  
As if sunlight stroked the spine  
To a hurdy-gurdy's whine  
And the shower ran white wine—"

—And Alvar Liddell was lying on his back in the sunshine half-way down the Rope-Walk, suggesting by languid lordly will-power that I should tickle his stomach . . . Yes—well—I had better pause to explain. Albany is allowed to harbour cats, though not dogs or children (once, as is well known, no woman might set foot in Albany unless heavily veiled and admitted after dark at the Wicket-Gate by some Regency Rake, for Purposes of No Good). We have an interesting company of residential cats, and

two or three patriarchs are nearly always to be seen browsing on top of the sentinel sand-bags at each front door, holding Parliament, or gossiping about Tips and Hermione sedately walking out together; while youthful stripling cats run up and down the tall fire-ladder permanently slanted against one or other of the sun-lit walls, its shadow sketching a more unsubstantial decoration to puzzle the cats. Alvar is not mine; his dwelling is a little further down towards the Mansion at the Piccadilly end; he is a handsome friendly fellow, and, as I said before, he likes having his stomach tickled. How curiously by such tricks of intimate association can a name become unhitched from its original ownership; and how swiftly for us in Albany has Alvar Liddell become the Cat with a man named after him; so that when people remark: "He was our best Commentator" (and rejoice at his recent return to the mike, as though he were a film star of olden days; which strangely proves you need not be seen to be popular) we involuntarily see a black three-cornered face with whiskers and pointed ears and yellow eyes, broadcasting with steady resolution; not despondent that France fall or the Low Countries, nor unprofessionally elated that the Russians have driven the Germans out of Stalingrad, nor surprised that an American army had landed in North Africa and written to the Bey of Tunis this very morning ("here's hoping it suits your Beyship") asking permission for the Allies to go through.

"Maketh kittens, maketh baby"— But the sight of our own Tips side by side with Hermione, a freak tortoiseshell from next door, brought a sadder thought into my appreciation of Stephen Benét's springtime mood. Those two cats so suitably paired, Tips a flame of marmalade and off-white—far-off white, since we introduced him to London basements—his long tail waving, his short legs arrogant, his eyes onyx black and beautiful, the handsomer of the couple (as the male should be, but Hermione's looks were quaint and provocative), one's automatic reaction was Victorian, sentimentally blessing the little ones to come; already visualizing a Winterhalter family group painted in terms of cat—until one remembered that that would never be, and that it was no use murmuring that the couple were made for each other or any such gentle platitude . . .

For Tips and Hermione are neutered cats and have only their own small lives and none to hand on. Our fault, the fault of cities and civilization, and I suppose nobody much to blame, for how

could we allow cats to swarm over Albany, unlicensed as rabbits in Australia: Among my receipted bills is one that runs: "To altering tom—3/6d", and I never come across this receipt (hunting perhaps for others that are not there and for the best of reasons) without feeling a pang of guilt. Yes, I deliberately paid that 3/6d for "altering tom", altering Tips—"Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds"—Oh, but it must be altered for Tips and Hermione, who might walk out together, up and down the Rope-Walk in Albany, scamper to and fro playing their charming nimble games, and yet (as one's mother mournfully said about gentlemen who flirted and were not serious in their intentions)—"nothing will come of it!"

Placing each paw fastidiously with a little shake first, for either this was after a shower or the porter had been washing down the Rope-Walk, Tips continued his promenade, ignoring me utterly. I had special reasons which will presently appear, for expecting he should gratefully adore me, in spite of that one desperate three-and-sixpenny reason why he should not. So I said rather crossly to his imperturbable back and conceited tail: "Think you're the cat's whiskers, don't you?", before I reflected that that was no sensible address to a cat. It was not, you see, my afternoon for being profoundly intelligent.

Already before lunch two or three things had happened in terms of nonsense, enough to shake one's faith in routine and sobriety. I had had occasion, for instance, to look through a locked casket containing a small packet of very precious letters and papers saved from the conflagration which had destroyed my Albany rooms in 1940, and which I had not closely examined since then. I was a little curious to see what had survived: My birth certificate; nothing particularly exciting about that little affair; purely a matter of business, in fact, except that it reminded me that London was my native city; and since war started, that was indeed a matter for pride. My marriage certificate "in the presence of us, Noel Coward and E. H. Laurie"—those two were the witnesses: E. H. Laurie, a close friend of my parents; Noel Coward, a nice quick-witted boy who had clad his unusually decorous mood with a grey suit of a cut and distinction that was a fair knock-out. Here was an impromptu drawing scribbled during an argument with Sir William Nicholson, the eminent artist: his conception of St. George attacking the dragon showed a very small St. George in a field boundaried by curls and sweeps of the dragon's tail:

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a lively illustration of Kenneth Grahame's story "The Reluctant Dragon", though it differed from Walt Disney's idea of featuring the dragon as a coy spinster lady. Kenneth Grahame country is all round Brambleford, home of my two years' homelessness; the field where legend placed the encounter is actually called Dragon's Field, and many think that the eccentric White Horse cut out of the turf just above the field is more truthfully meant to depict a dragon commemorating that English victory by an English saint. I am sure Kenneth Grahame had the right idea of the contest: and here in the casket was his signature in a fragment of letter not addressed to me, for I never knew him: "I hope you are all three well and free yourselves from these epidemic troubles which are afflicting your neighbours, Yours very truly, Kenneth Grahame." I did not value this much, for an autograph must have some personal significance; as for instance, lovingly hoarded, this postcard from Max Beerbohm: a black tie and a white tie neatly drawn side by side (the man has talent!) and: "Please scratch out whichever is not required and sign on the dotted line." Naturally I did no such thing; I wrote him the vital information, said he blowed to the wasted stamp, and kept the card. In our old days of formal dinners, the gentlemen, God bless 'em, never stopped ringing up beforehand to fuss me about their ties. But here is a letter also from Max Beerbohm and incomparably more precious, for it was written in appreciation of my Matriarch books, comparing their "full rich milieu" to turtle soup: "*Thick* turtle soup—of which one doesn't merely sip one's plateful to the end. Say, rather, a great lake of T.T.S. in which one swims warmly at one's leisure, swallowing from time to time gratefully and without indigestion one of the lumps of green fat that float so prodigally on its surface." Taking it, therefore, that Sir Max was addicted to turtle soup, I was glad this letter had been preserved, with a gay epistle from Noel Coward, written after one of his rare flops; he was always at his best after a flop. And one from H. G. Wells praising a flop of my own: a book called "The Augs". I happened to like "The Augs" stubbornly and crossly, so his letter was a deep consolation. Another impersonal autograph, this time of Anatole France, bestowed on me by an old gentleman in the custard-and-jelly-packet business: "this is of no use to me any more", he wrote when sending it; but could it ever have been of use? A letter beginning "My dear Miss Charlotte" and ending "Yours very faithfully W. M. T.", which might have



puzzled me had the writing been disguised, but as it was clearly recognizable as belonging to Mr. William Somerset Maugham, I assumed that a sudden desire had urged him to write in the person and style and sentiment of Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray, so I obediently answered him in the rôle he thrust upon me, of the eldest Miss Brontë; not so difficult as you might imagine; there's a little bit of Brontë in us all; probably even in Tommy Trinder. And next was a fan letter that made me a little sad, from John Barrymore, with a crest of a rearing serpent, and an opening that might stand as an example of what will content even the most insatiable author: "My dear Miss Stern, 'The Dark Gentleman' is not only superlatively the most delightful book I ever read about dogs—it is almost the most delightful book I ever read about anything!"

The last letter of the motley assortment snatched from oblivion ran as follows, "Dear Mrs. Robinson, I am enclosing a piece of string the exact waist measurement for Miss Stern's trousers. Yours sincerely."

This precious pre-conflagration parchment was a carbon copy, unsigned, and dated May 31st, 1940.

I replaced it carefully with the letters and drawings from Sir Max, Sir William, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, Noel Coward, and the late John Barrymore. There must have been some subtle reason why it was so carefully hoarded with these, some reason why it should have been saved from the fire, when a whole library went west. Not for me, in November, 1942, to question the scale of values which judgment and Providence had dictated in May, 1940. "I am enclosing a piece of string the *exact* waist measurement for Miss Stern's trousers"... I liked the word "exact"! Incendiary bombs may fall, waist measurements may go and come, but life rolls on, gathering fullness and energy by favour of the divinity which shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will.

Nevertheless, this puzzling document in the Tchekov style, retrieved that November morning from an obscure past, added its faint absurdity to a similar oddment of the same day, a telegram which arrived during lunch, the answer to a reply-paid question I had sent off earlier to a fellow-author. The reply itself was perfectly coherent. But wrapped up inside it, making it look fat and fanciful, was another telegram addressed not to me but to Frampton of Piccadilly: "Deliver costume to-day without fail. Kaye of Coggeshall." I debated with my two lunch-companions

on the sort of costume that Kaye of Coggeshall would have been likely to order from Frampton of Piccadilly: Would it be a tartan? Surely anyone as haughty and imperious would not be content with plain gentleman's suiting? I was so absorbed that I forgot to serve my guests with any lunch at all, and went on piling up generous helpings of food on my own plate and was half-way through it before I noticed . . . They had both decided to say nothing, but wait for realization and embarrassment to break upon me. Luckily at that precise moment when it did, the porter of Albany diverted attention by the delivery of a flat moist parcel containing four bronze kippers and a correct visiting-card: "With Captain Adams' compliments". Since the war, presents have been given and accepted in a spirit of both sense and sensibility. These kippers, I knew, came from the West Coast of Scotland, Morag, near my beloved Skye. Captain Adams of the Welsh Guards has been for twelve years secretary of Albany, and except for a slight unreason ages ago on the subject of second-floor dustbins, I need not force invention for tributes to his kindness, his geniality, his tact and keen knowledge of his job; and even that list leaves out his music and his kippers, both indications of how he appreciates the good things of life for the soul and for the body—(but I wish he had seen reason over those dustbins!) He was being just a little stern, now, over the cats in the Rope-Walk: "You must keep your cats under *control*!" I have done my three-and-sixpenny best, but cats are less controllable than even an April day in November.

Before we had finished our patchwork lunch, the post arrived with a parcel from America and a picture-postcard from Robin in North Africa; he had been wounded in the Battle of Knightsbridge, on June 1st, and was still convalescent but exuberant. The card was designed in gaudiness and ostentation, lavish with a spray of scarlet roses and "Happy Birthday to Gladys" in gold. My birthday happens to be in June, not in November; I was born under Gemini—"the lily-white boys clothéd all in green-o" of last war's marching-song; on the same date fifty years later, France laid down arms; the saddest birthday. But Robin had not been bothering about June or November; "Gladys" was appropriate enough, and he had scribbled me a pretty little set of congratulations in verse, Victorian style, among the improbable roses and cheap tinsel. Robin is the only visitor who ever came to see me, not in a car, not on foot, not on horseback, not in an aeroplane, not on a bicycle, not, certainly, in a sedan-chair or a

hansom cabriolet. I was living at a small hotel in the quiet village of Brambleford on the Berkshire Downs, when I was told that a Mr. Maugham please had come in a tank to see me please and was waiting and please would I see him? For a moment the breathless message left me a little bewildered: Mr. Maugham in (or on) a tank? Mr. Somerset Maugham? It seemed unlikely. A convoy of the Royal Armoured Corps with a rhinoceros delicately pictured on the mudguard had been passing all the morning, downhill along the winding road from the Downs, and uphill again to the further Downs, till eye and ear had grown weary of khaki and wheel and gun, crashing on and on interminably past my window. But now it was over; the last, I thought, had disappeared in its own raising of dust. Yet here was Mr. Maugham come to see me in (or on) a tank. I dashed out into the village street. Yes, a little further along, outside the Post Office, stood that macabre ironclad, that fore-shortened caterpillar, surrounded by the children of Brambleford, the evacuated urchins of London, the expectant mothers who had been sent down here out of the raids. They stood in an admiring ring idolizing the hero perched up on his seat high out of reach. "Robin!" I called softly. One shout of "Peter!", one leap, and Robin was down in the road and had gathered me into his strong young arms, in an up-to-date tableau of Millais' romantic picture: The Cavalier's Return—or do I mean The Black Brunswicker? I forget, but the grouping was the same as now, though Robin may have been more free and ecstatic than the Black Brunswicker, about whom I seemed to remember a touch of unnecessary restraint. The crowd collected round the tank gave us a sympathetic cheer as still embracing we paced slowly back to the hotel. In case anyone should misunderstand, I was fifty and Robin was twenty-three. If one day I live to gather his children round my knee and relate in frail tremulous quavers how Daddy had once, years ago, come to call on me in a tank, and they should answer, bored and wondering: "What the hell else should he call on you in?", I shall still go on feeling that it was an enchanting visitation.

The parcel from America was from Robin's uncle. Its label bore the usual official inscription: "Unsolicited Gift". Repeat the curt phrase softly and slowly, and again more softly and slowly, and kindness will creep in . . . "Unsolicited Gift" . . . Like birth and the breath of life. Like the quiet comfort of sleep and death. Solicitation cannot help to bring us these, as solicitation had failed

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to bring me an open view from my Albany window on the second floor; that went to the Military Tailors, an unsolicited gift.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AMAZING DAY

PONDERING on tanks (that olde-worlde vehicle), on kippers that shall never grow old, and birthday cards from Libya, and Kaye of Coggeshall, and beechnut bacon and de-hydrated onions unsolicited from America, and the four shaggy chrysanthemums, brilliant yellow, which Di had brought in, an offset to the four bronze kippers but both representing Still Life at its best, I was prepared for any strangeness that early afternoon, as I strolled down the Rope-Walk. The cats at their undevise*d* insouciant ballet were so like dancers in a special Albany proscenium, that imagination, mooching off on a fantastic slant, wondered why Robert Helpman and his antic crew did indeed consent to remain within a prescribed framework, while cats might at any moment whisk their ballet over the roofs and beyond the chimneys and round the corner and out of sight. Might it not fall out, with strangeness everywhere, that Helpman and his company, Comus, Sabrina fair, the Lady, the Brothers, and the Spirit of the Woods, should be suddenly impelled by an erratic desire for movement and grace without restrictions, to dance their ballet out through the doors of Sadler's Wells, down and up the streets of London, to the River embankment, across the bridge, in and out of the motor-buses and away into the country, oblivious of the panting audience following this most lovely, this most inconvenient Un-command Performance . . .

I suppose my mind's break-through from possibility was caused by the return to live in the same place as before, yet behind a strange front-door on the opposite side of the Walk, with a different outlook from a new level; always more unreal than if you change your residence altogether. You have that sense of queerness and this-is-none-of-I if you ever happen to be staying as guest in a house where once you had yourself lived and invited guests to stay; or by an even slighter difference, if you have shut up your home for any good reason and are living somewhere else, and

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re-enter your own rooms with your own key but as an outsider, to fetch something, perhaps, out of that empty habitation . . . I once heard or read of a telephone that was inhabited by a Poltergeist with a turn for clever teasing, for it would *only* consent to ring in the flat down below or up above; the owners could hear it ringing and madly knew it was for them, but their own telephone remained dead, though the correct number was always called—"Should have dialled ENG and had it seen to!" This may not be any more severely true than the idiosyncrasy of the drunken man who always saw one person coming along when there were really two, reversing the usual tipsy multiplication of seeing two where there was really one. Or that other story, gravely told as though indeed it were fact, of the man whose brain cannot have been very well, for he could not be divorced from a delusion brightly gleaming, that he was going upstairs whenever he came downstairs. He was nearly always late for his appointments . . .

Albany was self-contained as a country village between its Wicket-Gate at one end and its courtyard on to Piccadilly at the other. As I came out that afternoon, I saw ahead of me one of our two famous resident actresses tripping along to visit her friend, clasping a milk-jug in the same fashion as a Greuze girl forever clasped a wounded pigeon or a broken pitcher. I had observed with interest that it was always one who took the milk-jug and the other, by external evidence, who received it: "*Il y a toujours une qui baise et l'autre qui tend la joue*"—(for "*joue*" read "*jug*"). No jug was ever carried back along the Rope-Walk; at least, not in daylight; by now, the receiver must have a fine accumulation from a supply inexhaustible. If one of these two demi-mortals (the milk proved they were not yet wholly immortal) could have tripped over Alvar or Tips, and dropped the jug and broken it on the paving outside my window, her mourning would have made the incident still more Greuze, and I could not help hoping it would happen one day; not wastefully, but because I wanted the opportunity of seeing a fine actress illustrate a spilt milk proverb and a Greuze picture at the same time and for my benefit alone.

When I reached the porter's lodge, the cheerful little man, Kipps style, bantam size, whom war had sent Albany to replace the tall ex-guardsman who used to stand there in dignity and helpfulness, ran out full of enthusiasm to show each resident in turn, as we passed, his doctor's letter stating precisely that he had

flat feet and fallen arches, and therefore must retire and bid us all farewell. For some peculiar reason he adored showing this letter; it was worn out with frequent perusal; perhaps he felt it gave him official status. In case I could not read, he murmured the words with me, standing on tiptoe to look over my shoulder . . . "flat feet, fallen arches" . . . I had a slightly hysterical desire to sing a refrain which Young Glad had warbled while lighting my fire in Brambleford, two years before: "They're building flats where the arches used to be". Instead, I patted his arm and spoke words of consolation and encouragement, but he did not need them, for he attacked life in the spirit of a plucky little sparrow in the sunshine, who had found a piece of bread too large for him but would manage it somehow.

Glad and Winnie, aged fifteen and seventeen, had been bombed out of their homes and factories in the East End of London, and brought the same jolly Cockney quality to domestic service in the Berkshire cottage hotel where I was staying for much the same reason as theirs. Elderly guests spoke of the pair resignedly, repressing slight shudders, as "rough diamonds, *very* rough diamonds, but they will improve" . . . I thought myself that this was optimistic; they were simply out of their own natural element, taking change in their stride but longing to get back to the towns. I liked Glad the better of the two, because Glad had no chip on her shoulder, whereas Winnie suffered from some vicarious deep-down resentment on behalf of "Mum", who according to anecdote so often let authority and government have "a bit of her mind" that too little of it remained to let her young daughter start life free from inherited grievances and stale left-overs from the last war. But Glad was a merry urchin; pretty too, with tumbled flaxen hair and candid eyes; perhaps her Mum, who had died only a year before, was wiser in her training. Dad was a drunkard with a strict moral code who beat her when she went out with the boys, and then Mum had cried but Glad didn't care much; she was quite proud about the power and vigour of these beatings. Glad chattered away like a starling while she built my fire, asking my advice frequently, for she had no talent in fires; I was often shocked, and of course tried to hide that I was shocked, for I would not have put any check on these daily disclosures, by what I am sure were my false traditions of seemliness. She was a flirt and a jilt, both words too old-fashioned for her vocabulary, though they did well enough in mine. Her "boys" only escaped jilting for

a week or two longer if they were good at dancing as well as necking, and could put passion and energy into both. I remembered a long-ago best-seller called "Carnival" by Compton Mackenzie . . . And I thought this modern sturdier Jenny Pearl was dancing down the same path and (literally) spending too much on her dancing-shoes. Yes, she was sweet and frank, and she shocked me. And then I, who was neither sweet nor frank, shocked *her*. She had for several days been bewailing her own extravagance, for Winnie had a bicycle, her Mum had given her one, and she could ride into Lipcot any evening to the movies or to dance with the boys; more than anything in the whole world did Glad desire a bicycle too, that she might ride to pleasure at her pleasure. She knew the shop where it could be got, she knew how much it would cost her, she counted aloud how many weeks must pass of self-discipline and saving from her wages before the great moment of purchase could become possible. Among the letters she had brought in for me that morning was a quite unexpected cheque, and I had a sudden impulse to use some of it in bringing Glad her happiness at once; it was almost too easy (so I thought in my innocence and unworldliness of what was *comme il faut* between ladies!). "Look here, Glad, if you like I can lend you the money *to-day* to buy that bike, and you can pay me back in weekly instalments, just as you planned to save up for it." I expected ecstasy, but Glad was horrified: "Oh no, Miss Stern! Coo! I couldn't do that. Why, I don't know you, at least not hardly. Mum would have never let me. I mean, thank you ever so, Miss Stern, but I couldn't."

Mum's code. Yes, she was shocked fundamentally. Here was no affectation, no idea that with a little pressure she might reconsider and accept. "Why, I don't know you"—and every morning for weeks, she had fooled about with my fire and made confidences of such an intimate nature that I could hardly believe at moments that my ears were really hearing what they heard. Glad, squatting on her heels on the floor, and I, propped up on my pillows, stared at each other in dreadful embarrassment. Then I said feebly, and I think truthfully: "I'm sorry, Glad—I didn't mean—but I believe *my* Mum would have let me accept it if I'd promised faithfully to pay back week by week." Glad shook her head. I could see by her eyes what she thought of my Mum.

Lord T. rushed out of his door and passed me in the Rope-Walk,

off to train his brigade of carrier pigeons. I did feel that he ought to have a special uniform for his own particular war job; not a musical-comedy uniform, for carrier pigeons were a serious and responsible matter, but I objected to the inappropriate khaki hue; he should have worn a livelier iris to mark his daily preoccupation with the burnished dove; a dove may not be exactly the same as a carrier pigeon, but Noah could have testified that they were equally efficient to bring good news and bad; and I should not have been in the least surprised by an optical illusion that would have shown me Lord T. iridescent for an instant as he plunged across the sunny courtyard and round the corner. For London was never less sober than now, when every human being seemed to be weightless in bone and in tread; a pageant informed with the same gay elixir; where every stray encounter up and down Piccadilly caused you to turn and wonder what could have been that man's nationality? his badge? his job? Look at his cap; look at that armlet with a star and two flame-coloured wings springing from it—I have never seen that one before. What language is that? Dark faces from India; brilliantly fair faces, those are the Scandinavians. The men for once are the cock pheasants in the London crowd of this war's invocation, North, South, East and West.

The sky jobs are the strangest of all. Look up and see the brigade of pigeons wheeling in formation, turning from a silver glitter to sombre pewter grey, and then, as though at a word we cannot hear, all leaning sideways to catch brightness again. An expert told me that falcons who kill pigeons can be trained to kill German pigeons and leave our own alone. I laughed at the notion; he told me again, firmly; I remained incredulous; yet perhaps it is true as well as strange. At the corner of the courtyard I paused at the Yugoslav Fair which had just opened for Christmas, and went in. When I am reminded of Yugoslavia and Greece, or any of the conquered countries of whom we need not use the adjective "gallant" for they have made it sound inadequate, I find myself remembering Charleston and an epitaph on a grave behind a pair of those wrought-iron gates that delight the eye again and again in that lovely city of South Carolina. It was a quotation in praise of a colonel of the Civil War who had kept honour and faith with integrity "during those years that try men's souls".

During those years . . . and during these years, little enough difference.



However, on this particular afternoon, I dropped in to argue on a matter hardly in the tragic category: Several authors, including myself, had contributed autographed volumes, mostly novels, to be sold for the benefit of the Yugoslav Red Cross; and I was moved to remonstrate with the saleswomen for the prices they were charging for these books, where all else was in reason. I mean, authors are all very well, and autographs are all very well, but here and in this cause we could forfeit the compliment of being overvalued. The ladies did not agree with me; they had an innocent illusion that no price was too high to pay for the privilege of possessing our autographs as well as our books. A beautiful point of view, but let us be realists!—So I told them a fragment of dialogue I had overheard at the book-stall of a charity bazaar some years ago:

PURCHASER: I'd like *this* book, please (*holding it out unopened*).

SALESWOMAN (*proudly*): Certainly, madam; the author has autographed it for us.

WOULD-BE PURCHASER (*hastily replacing book*): Oh, then I'd rather have a clean one, please!

Here I expected peals of laughter from the group of charming saleswomen at the Yugoslav Fair. Surely this was a funny story, funny as well as true? On the contrary, I received murmurs of concern and embarrassment, of sympathy with the suffering it must have cost me to repeat it, and not a smile anywhere. Instead, to console me, they assured me that they had summoned a book expert and that every separate volume had been priced to conform with his valuation. I could not help asking if he had himself bought any at the prices he fixed. But contrite at seeing that my point of view was causing them pain and perplexity, I quickly dropped the subject, purchased a pair of doll's gauntlet gloves in lavender kid, exquisitely stitched, and departed, glad that I had solved the tiny problem of Hilary's Christmas present. Hilary was four, and I had a reputation to keep up with her because my first present had been so dearly prized: an egg-timer where the sand takes three-and-a-half minutes to run out from one little glass bulb on top of another; then you invert it and let it trickle again and that takes another three-and-a-half minutes. I believe Hilary did this for several hours every day till it was broken.

Musing priggishly on the transient nature of eggs and Time alike, my feet likewise went straying, instead of carrying me straight to Spink & Son; and presently I found I had turned

to the left out of Piccadilly into the Green Park. But this was not serious; I could right myself by a *détour*, down a familiar alley between opulent houses that would lead me into St. James's Street and thence into King Street.

Bugle notes from Wellington Barracks floated across the trees and grass, distant enough to sound more Agincourt than El Alamein; the call was just dying away when I became aware with a shock that the opulent houses on either side of me were not there at all.

A Londoner, it was nearly three years since I had lived in London. Now I was back and could see for myself what I had only heard and scarcely realized.

No good making a fuss. That, at least, most of us have learnt by now. Yet what I found most amazing about this strange London with its open prairies and courtyards and ruins, was the way that nearly everyone except myself seemed to be taking it all for granted. Either they were not familiar as I was with the old pre-war London, or they had actually been present while our capital was roughly knocked into these jagged shapes and broken landscapes, and so took it in one smash, not gradually.

"They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep . . ."

I know little of Jamshyd, gloriously blind or stone sober; but I had lived long enough in Italy and the South of France, in pre-war days, to know their ancient ruins; honey-coloured arenas in Rome, in Verona, in Arles and Nîmes and Fréjus; these were the courts of the lizard, flat against a baked wall that crumbled in the heat, whisking into a crevice as a step drew near. Ruins that are part of history cannot surprise us, and the courts of the lizard happened in history hundreds of years before we were alive, so that we have never seen them otherwise; it has seemed natural for Rome to have ruins, and Verona and Fréjus. But the courts of the lion are a different matter, and oneself to be present at the actual making of ruins in London feels a little too queer to be true, and too true to be good.

I was asked one day what were my views on the bombing of Rome and other Italian cities that had monuments of historical interest, and whether I "approved or disapproved?" "Approved" struck me in any case as a funny word to use in that conjunction; a prim word from the vocabulary of Mrs. Grundy. Surely history and its making is fortuitous, and what may or may not remain

of it is fortuitous too? What survives of Rome and equally of Coventry is already destined to be part of history; but at no period can we consciously establish historical monuments and ruins as "interesting", and anxiously preserve them from being violated; if we did, interest would immediately be drained away, and they would stand up dead and stiff as cardboard in their self-conscious isolation. As to the usefulness of bombing Rome—"Oo, I dunno," said Kipps, and: "I was thinking jest what a Rum Go everything is . . ."

A rum go. I stood in that alley which I had formerly known cramped between tall buildings where rich people had dwelt securely, and I saw that far back on the inner wall of a first-floor room, a plane-tree had been painted and was still there, faded from its exposure to wind and weather; the inside walls not weather-beaten and scarred as one might have supposed, but delicately bloomed like an invalid lady who has at last been persuaded by those who nurse her that a walk and some fresh air would miraculously restore her health and complexion after being shut up for so long. The anonymous but doubtless fashionable interior decorator of the house that had once been there, could hardly have foreseen that the decoration would last longer than the interior. I imagined how the party invited to the house-warming would have praised the originality of the painted branches with their delicate clusters of hanging bobbles, so different from sur-realist wall-paper or classic frieze. "Really," they might have chattered to a gratified host or hostess, "you could almost imagine, when you look at it, that you were out of doors!"

Yes, and now it *was* out of doors, with all the other plane-trees of London.

That alley fascinated me. I had already seen plenty of bombed buildings, but only at this moment of discovering the painted plane-tree did I begin to be vitally aware of them all. Who ever felt that ruins were pale and dead? "Now we see how the Romans lived!" we used to say: their walls, their handsome baths, their really almost modern *chauffage central*. Now we see how the Londoners lived, future tourists may say: their fragments of staircase, their wine-cellars and kitchens. That fireplace on the first floor, on no floor at all, look, it has white tiles . . . When I moved into my present rooms in Albany, the builder said no white tiles were to be had *anywhere* ("don't you know there's a war on?"). It looked an expensive fireplace; I wondered if the rest of the

room had been white with a thick deep blue rug and a couple of comfortable white arm-chairs drawn up close to the flames . . . You could not help being aware of quiet drama in the way those two big West-End houses facing one another across that passage off Green Park, were now piled up in irregular ramparts and battlements; all their secrets helpless and exposed. The bony framework of a staircase climbing up and up and then suddenly vanishing into air; a hot-water system looking peculiarly derelict, for hot-water systems need human beings dependent on them, to justify their existence; weeds and willow-herb in the sunken courts where the masons had expensively laid the foundations of houses not yet old enough to be ruins, prematurely given over to the lion and the lizard . . . It would hardly have disconcerted me to see a lion pad out from behind one of the broken columns and stroll down to a pool of rusty rain-water to drink; not much more astonishing than the plane-tree painted on a wall where no artist could have dreamt his picture would have had so wide and careless a public. No roof to the multitudinous walls, but casements torn and bare on to blue sky, and a squadron of Spitfires above and behind, drawing their patterns after them in loops and sharp white lines crossing and re-crossing, and then slowly flattening with woolly serrated edges . . . Such menace of movement and war's preparation, but the two mansions were out of it now, and what was left of them stood not in desolation but in dignity, unable ever to close their doors, curtain their windows, and be private again.

To-day had been queerly carved out of strangeness. No, carved is the wrong word; you must have solid substance before you can carve it. To-day, if I had seen chimneys miraculously afloat and unsupported above a ruin without a roof, I would have raised no argument as to whether I were seeing true or not, but have accepted it as part of the phantasmagoria; no more debatable than, high up and far away above the wall with the plane-tree, after the fighters had scrawled their arabesques and left the sky, that tiny silver bladder with just enough of a baby-elephant resemblance to make me want to croon a Dumbo lullaby.

But the men and women using this alley as a short cut, took no account of strangeness. They had adapted themselves. I had noticed them *not* noticing in Bond Street and Conduit Street and Savile Row and Bruton Street and Berkeley Square; not noticing when they saw a fertile view of park and green trees at the end of what had once been a blind street and a grim blockade of houses;

not noticing tanks and lakes and reservoirs in Mayfair; not noticing when they saw in Hanover Square a notice jauntily stuck up from the grass saying: "Please latch the gate"—and no sign of a gate, past, present or future. They merely went on with their normal life.

There is a new major virtue which the war has required, and requiring, created: Adaptability. Adaptability was not always a front-line virtue, as it is now. Indeed, until the war, it was looked on as merely a pleasant little social quality, convenient to have about the house; a drawing-room grace. We said: "He's so adaptable", in the same tone of light scorn as: "She's so good-natured". The leopard unable to see any need to change his spots, might thus have called a chameleon "so adaptable". Really strong fine natures, unyielding and unpersuadable, deeply rooted as trees that go down and down into the soil, had little use then for a temperament like running water, clear and shallow, changing pace and changing shape as required, cupping into pools, swirling around the stubborn boulders.

Now, those who can adapt themselves swiftly and unselfishly to strangeness, are surprisingly of far higher value than the deep-rooted who formerly had our respect and admiration. They, the unadaptable, the hold-fast-to-permanence brigade, plod slowly along as if their boots were caked with earth; or they squander their vitality on looking backwards, instead of gaily forwards and sideways, up and around. Nostalgia for the past and for the old ways, is a handicap in total war. Nor is it enough for them to brace themselves for one big wrench and one dramatic change, and proudly think themselves adaptable to have done so—(saying they never cared for children and now, listen, they have children in the house; or they never cared for porridge and now, look, they have porridge on their plate)—for directly they may have accustomed themselves to the new sounds and the new ways, it is probable that these will again be suddenly and illogically swept away or transformed into something else; we have to get used to not one change or two changes, but to Change itself, in this jiggling, teasing, broken-up universe of Puck and Poltergeist.

So I walked on at last to Spink & Son. I had never been inside the establishment before, and for a moment I wondered if I were entering the shadowy richly-jewelled interior of San Marco in Venice. "Please," I whispered in all diffidence, showing them what I had brought, "I wonder please if perhaps you could tell me or find out or something, because I haven't the faintest idea

myself, though I think it must have belonged to my great-grandfather, so please what is *this*?" "Certainly," said the expert, obliging me without the slightest hesitation; "it's an Order of Chivalry from Tunis: the Nicham Iftikar."

The Nicham Iftikar is a ten-pointed star in alternate rays of green and red enamel set round a circle of cut steel on green, with more cut steel between the enamel rays; a handsome decoration, its miniature, too (to be worn at Functions) is a pretty toy. It is unlikely I shall ever discover what my great-grandfather had accomplished to deserve it. Perhaps he just gave a dinner-party to an eminent personage, and had the Nicham Iftikar graciously bestowed on him between the dessert and coffee. He was a Spanish Israelite called d'Almeda. One of his ancestors, an earlier d'Almeda, had been a poet. Late in life, my great-grandfather moved to Trieste and settled there with his five beautiful daughters; one of them married a Rakonitz from Vienna, and my mother was their eldest daughter. Mother's youngest sister had never married, so she lived at home with her parents in Ladbroke Grove, and then most intimate and personal possessions thus naturally passed on to her. She herself died last summer at the age of seventy-four. This Order and its miniature, and another closely resembling it, she had handed to my sister a few months previously in a battered cardboard cake-box (Fullers') with an anxious injunction that the contents were very special and very secret and must not be opened during her lifetime. When we did open it, my sister and I, we experienced that bewilderment which, I think, nearly always strikes those who inherit as well as rational jewellery and valuables, any small collection of touching irrelevant objects that had accrued affection for reasons that will now never be known and can never be understood. Here was an old-fashioned garnet brooch; a small wooden box with a view of Ramsgate Pier on the lid; a broken ear-ring in black and seed pearls; a square brass manly-looking ash-tray (she did not smoke, and anyhow this looked as though it came out of a man's club); a leather case containing two silver long-stemmed cups exquisitely engraved with ears of corn and a flying bird and an inscription celebrating the occasion of my grandparents' silver wedding, Austrian Rakonitz and Spanish d'Almeda; a rubbishy tortoise-shell comb; a rubbishy penholder and pencil in cheap white bone; my Viennese grandfather's birth certificate set out with many flourishes—  
—And these two Orders of Nicham Iftikar.

Before I left Spink & Son, they showed me a picture of the Order, to persuade me that their first immediate knowledge of it was not merely a lucky guess. Respecting them for their omniscience, I thanked them and departed.

Strangeness had reached its peak between my entrance and exit. Our family relic had lain for at least fifty years hidden away by my aunt who had died in the summer; and who can tell for how many years before that, among my grandmother's treasures; and she must have had it sent to her after her own father died in Trieste, perhaps a century ago, perhaps more. Yet waiting till I happened to be in London again, and happened to have an hour to spare in the afternoon, on this very day of November 9th, 1942, when Tunis had for the first time leapt into the Radio News Bulletin at 7 a.m., on this very day I chose to stroll round and have it identified, and it was an Order of Chivalry belonging to Tunis.

The pattern goes on, like one of Bach's weaving fugues; and most of the time, if we ever pause to think about it, it seems to be flung together in a haphazard sort of way. But every now and then we are startled, as I was startled, standing there on the pavement outside Spink's.

I have tried not to use the word coincidence in describing the episode. I have tried very hard. Coincidence when it is not in our own lives seems trivial and hardly surprising at all, and we shy away when others try to impress us with an account of some astonishing example of it.

When coincidence is fortunate to ourselves, we are apt to surmise grandiloquently that it is all Part of a Pattern. When infelicitous, however, we cease to comment, preferring to sever a bad bit from any supposed pattern, and to regard it as sudden, incoherent, undeserved.

All the same, you must admit that it was a million to one against this encounter of Tunis and Tunis in my life (which had hitherto been totally Tunisless) falling on November 9th, 1942. Nor am I trying to show by implication that the whole world-war must have been shaped towards my discovery of the Order's origin at just that instant, by my aunt's death and the unpacking of her possessions and the postponement of my enquiry till I actually returned to London from the country. Rather do I suggest with some humility that my own life, in the same chain of events but approached from the opposite direction, might have been gradually

shaped to conform with the information given me by Spink & Son on the very day which brought Tunis into the big news.

Yet I feel, looking back on any amazing day of strangeness and coincidence, that it is more significant, more intended, than a planned day of steady routine, a day arranged consciously by no-one more talented than ourselves and therefore of no importance in any pattern except the most trivial. For a fantastic, a so-called "unaccountable" day comes from somewhere else; chaos could not produce those magical arabesques; and though they look as though they appeared by any haphazard route from beyond and outside, may they not really be produced by our selective instincts and our desires operating sooner or later in latitudes where we are hardly aware of them?—the result of the sort of people we are, and therefore much more genuinely our one day's pattern than just the superficial and orderly day prepared beforehand which conceals nothing and works out according to plan.

These significant yet crazy days of seeming coincidence recognize no boundaries of time or geography; they are, after all, only half our own; the rest belong to where they impinge on the pattern of someone else whose day's ordinary rhythm they have broken up. It is not easy to cite any one of the ten thousand instances that spring to my mind, without bringing in names and intimate events that cannot matter to anyone except myself. Such as that day when I would not have been lunching at the Ivy with Leueen if her dining-room table had dried more quickly; she said the dishes might stick to the paint, and I said the smell of paint made me instantly sick, so what with one thing and another, and what with a near-by restaurant saying haughtily when she rang up for a table: "For which day, Madam?" as they might have said "for which month?"—we went to the Ivy, where however crowded, they may be, they love and welcome the Old Faces; and there the very child happened to be having lunch, whom by purest chance I had seen the day before in a trade show of a film where I would not have gone but for the invitation of the director, his first essay; I had not seen him for years, and we both came to live in Albany a few weeks ago, and he told me Wilfred Lawson was acting in this film. Wilfred Lawson has that indefinable quality in his voice and acting (Edith Evans has it too, and Celia Johnson, and certainly the Lunts; and Leslie Howard had it) which would draw me anywhere, even to an underground projection-room in Wardour Street. I once wrote a book called "Little Red Horses" ("The



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

Rueful Mating", in America). Of all my books I cared for it most, and still care. At the period of the vogue for heroes and heroines under sixteen, producers in Hollywood and England had over and over again *nearly* made a film of "Little Red Horses" but could never find quite the right child to play Halcyon. But at the trade show and then at the Ivy I thought I had at last found her. And this accidental sequence occurred on the morning I received a letter from my nephew in Brazil, written nine weeks earlier, mentioning a musical party at a flat recently rented, by a friend of his, from some Jewish refugees; he looked up and suddenly saw on the wall a reproduction of "Little Red Horses", Franz Marc's picture which had hung on my sitting-room wall in Albany and was burnt when the incendiary bomb fell on my rooms in October, 1940. I had named my book from this picture; the original painting hangs in the gallery at Essen. On the night before I received this letter, our bombers raided Essen, and perhaps Franz Marc's picture of "Little Red Horses" prancing free on an open heath, was destroyed with some of Krupps armament factory.

You see what I mean: There is nothing far-fetched or improbable or even particularly exciting about this especial pattern (unless you take far-fetched literally), yet into one day's noose it loops a dead Bavarian artist, raids over Germany and England in 1940 and 1943, Jewish refugees in Rio de Janeiro which men say is the most beautiful city in the world, a great actor, a child actress, a dining-room table, two restaurants and a pot of paint. A day gallivanting in space and in time without paying the slightest respect to any management of mine.

Jane Austen uses the phrase "I collect" when we now say: "I gather" ("gather" is a shade nearer to her original meaning than the more obvious "re-collect"). To keep calm and collected, a peculiarly desirable state of mind in ourselves as in those around us, gives us an idea of a mind whose contents are not necessarily prim and relevant, but with its odds and ends, its natural fantasies *collected* (that is to say, assembled) by the owner into some coherence that will give him personal satisfaction. "A collected day" expresses, perhaps, what I feel over certain amazing days in my life; assembled days which would not be amazing if one always assembled them. If one were to substitute assembling afterwards, for arranging beforehand, it might even help us to endure life as it must be now, wild and uncertain. We are forbidden by common sense to plan ahead any more, so let us literally take it as it comes and literally

call it a day, not to stumble blindly through it, but *live* through it with a habit of amazement as it unfolds; more objective and less exhausting than to allow tumult and coincidence, strangeness and inconsequence, to discourage the mind's new habit of relating even unrelated events. Our days should remain unforced but need not pass unmarked.

And supposing one were right in assuming that each individual day with its manifold contributions reaches us as an unsolicited gift from a more talented Source than our own pre-war tidier conception of what a day should be, then, without being too metaphysical or self-conscious, we could while yet alive watch what was happening in each curved division of twelve or twenty-four hours—and get the Big Idea, perhaps, before the end? For the division of time into days is not wholly arbitrary and man-made. Light and darkness have something to do with it, which might indicate that the contents of each day are also not haphazard and pitched into it at random, overlapping at the edges. Anyhow, it could do us no harm to check up on the matter; enlighten ourselves (which can be done without any real waste of effort) as to what is contained time after time within each ring of light before darkness falls, and see if the results first startle us, then add up to sense and satisfaction.

There are two or three dangers in this: chiefly that you are liable to look on each day as though it must somewhere contain a sort of inevitable rescue squad, to appear in case the rest of the day's sequence looks like coming to pieces, without even a lively incoherence to distinguish it; and you are disappointed if the rescue squad fails to turn up; in fact, likely to disown such a day, in the same spirit as those sundials of smug character declare: "I only mark the sunny hours".

Time is more slippery to collect than events. For strangeness must declare itself whenever we try to think objectively about time, instead of hastily adding "the great healer" and sliding on to a more incisive subject. I once promised a child of four to send her a special present—"in a week". She asked: "What is a week?", a very natural question at her age. But I thought, stumped for an answer, what is a week? One's music-mistress used to say: "You must keep time", but in time we learnt that we did not want to keep the beastly thing (is your servant a metronome?). And then again, what is Summer-Time? And piling on the agony, what is Double Summer-Time? . . . Explain that to a child of four, if you

can! I have recently been made to feel seventy-two when I am only fifty-two, by a girl of eighteen who tried to argue with me that directly you put the clock on or back *one* hour, time became time again as it had been In The Beginning. "Two hours," I contradicted; but she insisted: "No, only one", until I gave way suddenly and much too quickly (as one does in a tug-of-war when the rope breaks) for I remembered that for as long as *she* could remember, Summer-Time stood an eternal fixture where it had been placed in May 21st, 1916, and it was only the second hour that to her would appear flexible. So to console myself, I played with the idea of writing a short play called "The Three Murdered Sisters", who haunted an old manor in conventional style, doing their ghost act at midnight; a wrathful eldest sister would want always to keep the old-fashioned midnight; the second sister, slightly more modern, preferred pre-war Summer-Time, one hour out of alignment; the third and most up-to-date sister declared rebelliously that she would only consent to do *her* haunting by a clock that had been put on two hours. As a climax, they decided to break up the trio and each haunt the manor separately at a different midnight. Perhaps it would be more effective as a story than a play, because then I could show the owners of the manor wholly bewildered, wondering what could have happened.

Time and the War. Everybody seems compelled at some moment or another to ask the same question: "How long do *you* think this war is going to last?" But what sort of reassurance can they expect? People of brilliant and independent brain-power suddenly become trustful, and put their question in the most unlikely quarters; an incredible tendency of the human race to hope they may find infallibility somewhere. The same eager futile question was asked, no doubt, during the Hundred Years' War (but we would rather not think of that) and the Thirty Years' War (faintly preferable). Curious that these earlier wars should have been named from their duration; no one calls the last war: "The Four-and-a-quarter Years' War".

What names have other wars picked up, in time? "The War" and "The Last War" will be our way of least resistance until the Next War, when *this* one will automatically become "The Last War" (like Baby and then the New Baby). In the end, because the name that springs first into our mind will obstinately remain with us, better let it come easily than try and strain it to be more appropriate or dignified. How do you mention the war of 1914?

The Great War is the official title, but really we cannot go on calling it that, as Greater and Greater wars lumber along like a procession of pantomime giants. The Crimean War was named regionally; the Boer War, racially; the Napoleonic War politely christened itself after the leader on the opposite side (query, did the French return the compliment and refer to it as *la Guerre Vellington*?). The Franco-Prussian War more impartially brought in both nations. In the Wars of the Roses the name has been derived from vegetable association; the American War of Independence was named after the abstract idea for which they were fighting. Wars name themselves; they will not be named by any fixed rule. The Crusades is the most thrilling name of all, driving out war's brutality, fixing its symbol. The War of Jenkins's Ear, in 1739, was a symbol too, but somewhat over-localized.

In time and by all its grave laws of absurdity, what will this war be called? The World War, I expect.

If only time would contract like a concertina so that the two ends of the war, start and finish, could be brought closer and closer together till they touched. But time is not in the least like a concertina; still we stand like Ali Baba in front of the closed door of the future, shouting at it in vain: "Open Rye!" "Open Barley!" "Open Oats!"—louder and more frantic, but never remembering the right conjuration. So the door of the cave never opens. Long before the films did their bit to visualize the abstract into a procession of little pictures, we were taught to see old Father Time loping along with his scythe. Time the Great Healer . . . Time the Great Beaver! We are too impressed by his venerability, his bald head and long white beard divided to flow over either shoulder; we should be disrespectful and shout at him: "Arctic Egg Double Beaver!" (a rare species).

When Robin was taken at the age of six with his little friend Michael into the Mummy Room at the British Museum, Michael's mother was overwhelmed by the gloom and the sinister aspect of those long-dead Egyptian kings, the papyrus dryness of the air. She wondered whether she had been right to bring into these gloomy halls, two little boys, sensitive perhaps and swift to take impressions; better lead them quickly out and into the nearest tea-shop. Then she saw that they were darting about and playing Beaver among the Pharaohs and the Rameses! If G. F. Watts had painted the picture, he might have called it "The Triumph of Life Over Death".

## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

When I was a little girl, if they ever called me a backward child, they must have meant a looking-backward child; for I grew up to claim the proud title of the world's champion nostalgist. Then, if I wistfully hankered for the past and felt bad about it all, they chose to diagnose it briskly as "growing pains" (perhaps growing pains are really the explanation of all hankering). I must have been about ten when my parents invited a rampant contralto to stay with them. Almost every evening she was unleashed to sing Tosti's Good-Bye, a song which was having an immense vogue; they said he had composed it to Queen Margherita of Italy for whom he sighed with a hopeless Ruritanian passion. There was one line: "All our to-morrows shall be as to-day" which for some peculiar reason got right under my skin. In a mood of the richest melancholy I used to go and walk under the trees at the far end of the garden, and muse on that bleak prospect. Luckily I was cured, not by the doctor ordering me a long sea-voyage, but by one of fate's less expensive and more original improvisations. I went to stay with friends at a hotel at Folkestone; and Tosti himself, an active little man with a pointed white beard, not at all like Rudolph Rassendyll or Hamlet, was staying at the same hotel. I watched him play Diabolo on the lawn. I played Diabolo myself, a fascinating game. I played it *at* him, and discovered I could spin my reel faster, toss it higher, catch it more neatly. There was Tosti hopping about like mad, and myself as jolly as any sandboy. Easy to forget that all my to-morrows must be as to-day.

"Time is on our side" both sides declare in time of war, never seeing how absurd to materialize Time and enlist it, even for a flash of a sentence, into our gallant ally. "You can 'ave Rome", the rich money-lender once said on his return to Monte Carlo after a week's absence exploring Classic Italy. When anyone says to me now: "You must give me time", my answer is on the same lines: "You can 'ave time—and welcome."

And Time brought me round and back again to Albany and the Rope-Walk on this topaz afternoon of November (yes, I am aware I called it "amber" before, and accept the reprimand), with my great-grandfather's decoration which had gone out nameless an hour before, now triumphantly identified as the Nicham Iftikar, Order of Chivalry of Tunis. I let myself in with my key at the Wicket-Gate end, and turned absently into E doorway instead

of further on into D, which was now, in 1942, my second Albany home. A plate outside E testified that Lord Macaulay had lived there further back in time. He wrote a letter to a friend, dated 12th July, 1841: "I have taken a very comfortable suite of chambers in the Albany; and I hope to lead, during some years, a sort of life peculiarly suited to my taste,—college life at the West-End of London . . . We shall have, I hope, some very pleasant breakfasts there, to say nothing of dinners. My own housekeeper will do very well for a few plain dishes, and the Clarendon is within a hundred yards."

On my desk I found a letter that I had forgotten to post, so I strolled down to the pillar-box at the Piccadilly end of the Rope-Walk; our own pillar-box, our Albany pillar-box, for which I have a possessive affection, especially as it gives me an excuse for idling in one of the little paved gardens on either side of the few shallow steps leading up to the hall of the Mansion and its sedate courtyard. These formal gardens have an eighteenth-century flavour, their stone urns and green tubs planted with daffodils or tulips or geraniums as the seasons move round. They each have a stone bench and a decorative figure in the middle; one is a stone boy supporting a bird-bath; the other, on the pillar-box side, a dancing Cupid—no, not dancing; at least, I was sure during the nine years I lived in G 3, that he was shooting upwards with his bow and arrow. But he was dancing now; a sort of Mount Olympus version of the Can-Can. What *had* happened to him?

. . . Only that like so many of us, he had suffered a raid change; and the result was slightly fantastic. Because we have no control over quotations and their relevance, I had always thought, when I passed him in the old days: "little wanton boys that swim on bladders", which even then was not particularly apposite, nor indeed, in the present state of the Mediterranean, any sort of pastime at all. Now, however, he had become the little wanton boy who wore his heart on his sleeve, or at all events, his leg on his arm. For the same raid that gave the Military Tailors their open view right across where my rooms had been, had blown off Cupid's leg which someone had thoughtfully hung on his arm at a gay angle which did not betray until close investigation that anything had happened at all; merely that he, too, was celebrating April in November, dancing against the brilliant drop-scene of Virginia creeper rioting over the garden wall behind.

. . . Was it my fancy that this infusion of life and fantasy blended,

was happening all along the formal Rope-Walk? The very bins of sand standing ready for action in the Watteau gardens, the fire-ladders slanted ready for action against the walls . . . My foot involuntarily sent a pebble spinning along the covered passageway as I turned to go home, and a cat, blinking and dozing under the quiet hedge, shot out and went tearing along after the provocative tinkle, in and out among the orderly stripes of sun and prim shadows of the Walk.

## CHAPTER III

## "THE LIE OF THE LAND"

I HOPE the Military Tailors care as much as I have always cared, for what they can see from their windows.

I left the little hotel at Brambleford in March, 1941, and went to live two miles away across the Downs at the foot of the Danish Camp. Here at Ruston Copthall, I was able to rent a most engaging furnished cottage with a garden even more enchantingly furnished by a fig-tree on a south wall, bearing leaves of green flame on its coils of muted silver root and branch, and later on, fruit that could be picked and eaten before breakfast, warm with the sun. I know of no better furniture than a fig-tree, and have always thought with longing of the room described I forget where in Greek literature, with a tree growing up in the middle to support the roof, and a bed of ox-hide dyed fig-purple stretched between the roots. However, lacking a tree in my bedroom, I must have a view from the window; "must"—but one remembers every Nannie's: "There is no 'must'", so I had better say instead that I badly want an open view from my window, and am restless and unable to settle down and be good unless I have it. My bedroom in the cottage was full of light and good-humour, with a deep window-seat, and a bow window that faced on to the garden enclosed by old mellow walls; high pear-trees and birds hopping on the lawn completed the picture, and you could not ask for anything prettier. Nevertheless, for the first few weeks I had those familiar symptoms, reprehensible and ungrateful, of wondering what-was-wrong-with-where-I-was; a childish desire to scowl at the lawn in spite of its bright show of crocuses painted in orange and mauve;

knock down the walls, push aside the budding branches of the trees; even though they were not intrusive but a full seventy yards away. Then I suddenly discovered that all the principal windows of this pleasant cottage looked due south, and there was no earthly reason why I should not spend £5 more happily than perhaps I had ever spent £5 before, in having a little window cut out of the blank wall of my bedroom where it could face east, right across the farm and the meadows and the distant trees, to the Berkshire Downs resting quiet and bare against the sky. After this simple act was successfully done, I reflected that here, just by pushing a hole in the wall, creating a picture where no picture had been before, framing the sunrise which till then had always struck on to dead bricks, here was a small miracle. It is a sin to be possessive; not quite so sinful to be possessive about the unpossessable . . . so I know that for the rest of my life I shall own that view and own that window. I used to kneel and gaze and take my fill of gazing (no, the kneeling part was not some asinine affectation; the window had to be cut in fairly low because of the downward tilt of the roof). And from that day onwards, I ceased being restless and wondering what was wrong with the cottage and myself and the lawn and the pear-trees, and even wrong with the lilac bushes, and even with the waft of violets that followed you round from innumerable little clumps planted at random; blue violets and also white violets that must bring luck because they are rare and strange and small and hidden, so that catching sight of them for the first time and till you realize there is indeed a cache of white violets in your garden, you simply say: “Late snowdrops”, and walk on.

But at last it seemed natural to be living in the country, even though I had lived for eight years in Albany at the heart of London, and only gone away sometimes to the moors or to the river or the sea, to the South of France or to California, Copenhagen or Skye. And lying in bed in the early morning and looking contentedly down through the south bay window that was originally thrown in with the rest of the cottage, or more respectfully towards my own little east window which had brought magic into the room, I reflected on other windows and other views which for me had that same special answer to whatever it is that each of us specially knows: that mysterious rightness or mysterious wrongness that lies at the very bones of a house, a room, a garden, a landscape. Vernon Lee understood it: “The lie of the land means walking or



climbing, shelter or bleakness; it means the corner where we dread a boring neighbour, the bend round which we have watched someone depart, the stretch of road which seemed to lead us away out of captivity. Yes, *lie of the land* is what has mattered to us since we were children, to our fathers and ancestors; and its perception, the instinctive preference for one kind rather than another, is among the obscure things inherited with our blood, and making up the stuff of our souls. For how else explain the strange powers which different shapes of the earth's surface have over different individuals."

There was a bedroom in a house at Yoxford, in Suffolk, which held for me such strange property of magic. I might as well stop saying "for me", for we all know and can take it for granted that magic is a lonely thing that each separate member of the herd can only identify for himself, and which cannot be supplied wholesale. I had taken this furnished house in 1928 for convalescence after bronchial pneumonia, and remember very little about it except just my own bedroom. The rest of the house, I believe, was gloomy, and the garden neglected and overgrown. But I loved my large room with five lattice windows set in several walls; vine leaves curling round their framework, shaken gold and green in the sun. Beyond the lattices and vine leaves, lay the whole of Suffolk, and Suffolk had gradually revealed that mysterious grace, that special *lie of the land* which so contented me.

Cornwall is the favourite coloured piece of England for almost everyone who does not declare a defiant preference for Devonshire or Somerset, Yorkshire or Cumberland, Norfolk, Kent, Sussex or Wiltshire, or—come to that—Berkshire! How absurdly difficult it is to make an answer to any simple direct question of the kind usually put by children who like to have things clearly listed and preferred as to one's "favourite" this or that? One's "favourite flower": lilac—no, freesias—or had I forgotten violets again?—sweet peas in a scented mass—deep red roses, but singly, not in a bunch—Iris Susiana, strange and tall and rare—dahlias for splendour. And sea-thrift in Cornwall, with the fresh sweet tang of wind and salt.

At the cottage where we had rooms in Church Cove near the Lizard, you also had to squat low on the floor to look out of the window, so you were not tempted to lie there and dream as you might have done had it been more accessible, for the view was the strong plain line of cliffs that sloped up the headland, and the

cove thrusting in underneath where the water was dark velvety green, but clear glass green where it lapped and splintered, and purple further out where rocks threw up their shadow from below. In early spring, primroses were flung all over the slope of the cliff rushing down nearly as far as the sea; primroses are so masochistic, and I liked it later in May and June when the pink sea-thrift was out, covering the sea-wall with velvet tufts and cushions.

If I had been remembering a view from the window at Sennen Cove, Land's End, instead of at Church Cove near the Lizard, I would not have had to lie on the floor, but sit on the window-seat of Mrs. Nick Pender's cottage; not a creamy thatched cottage as was Mrs. Bosusto's, but a square strong little building in grey shingle, called Nile House—irrelevant save for lotus-eating spells. That had a wider view; the fishing-fleet rocking lazily in the curve of the stone lugg; you could waste time watching the boats going out, watching the boats come in, watching the boats . . . Nile House at the Land's End of England, and The Sphinx on an island of the Thames below Chertsey . . . Never could I have imagined anything less Egyptian than the prospect beyond those two windows.

I took that house on the island for three summers running . . . and "running" is a pleasant word for the summer you remember by the river running on either side of your garden, as though the lawn were the prow of a ship. The third summer was the June, July and August of 1939, not in itself a period of great tranquillity . . . Apart from war impending and the news perpetually coming to pieces in your hand, so to speak, I was ill most of the time, so that enchantment could only be loosely woven; yet even now I am surprised how I can look back on that time with longing instead of horror.

In the nursery or at the Kindergarten we learn simple lessons from simple proverbs and from sentences of one syllable such as "The cat sat on the mat; it is a good cat" (not always, as we shall see in the last chapter of this volume). Moralists sigh over our pretty innocence, and the wise say that lessons do not end with school and nursery but go on all through our lives and that they never grow easier . . . and so on and so forth. The odd thing is that the wise were perfectly right, and every now and then I shall set down crossly or in amazement some new lesson that I have learnt. Here and at once I may as well add an amendment which sounds contradictory; the lessons never grow any easier to learn,

and yet they never grow less simple in statement. Listen, then, while I discover that you must "kiss the joy as it flies", and that those windows with a view meaning strangeness and magic and that peculiar feeling in your bones that it is all right at last and you can settle down, have always and always been set in houses where I could not settle down because they were not mine and were somehow unattainable: houses which had been let to me furnished; hotel bedrooms; lodging in cottages belonging variously to Mrs. Bosusto, Mrs. Pender, Mrs. Tre-Pol-and-Pen. That house on the island of the Thames was not mine, and though presently it was offered for sale and somebody bought it, somebody was not I. The window which I knocked out of the wall looking across to the Berkshire Downs, was not mine in my own cottage: I rented it furnished from the doctor's wife, Sophia. Nor was the house in Suffolk mine; nor would I have had it mine; I cannot even remember the owner's name, and I merely stayed there three months because I had been ill, and chance and an advertisement threw me there.

Monte Carlo, Santa Monica . . . Those views belong to me. Which is nonsense, of course, because no view can ever belong to any human being, but only the house that holds the room that holds the window that holds the beloved view. At Santa Monica, I did as everyone does when they work in Hollywood: I became the temporary tenant of one of those furnished houses that get passed from owner to owner, as actors and writers come and stay and go again; less than any other residence can it ever be possessed, and must in time acquire a slightly raffish air from too frequent abandoning. From windows at Santa Monica I saw the Ocean (which is the Pacific) at the foot of the Palisades (which is the cliff) and over the Canyon (which is the valley—and now you can speak the language as well as I can). I had chosen a bungalow house (though not in the least gimcrack or jerry-built, as the earthquake shortly afterwards was to prove) built round three sides of a loggia in what they are pleased to call "Spanish Style". My bedroom, I was delighted to discover, was labelled by its key: "Master-bedroom", which would be a good name for a play, by Ibsen's "Master-Builder" out of Ohnet's "Iron-Master". It was a beautifully-proportioned room with plenty of space, two big windows looking west towards the ocean, and north on to the aromatic road, striped in coolness or brilliant cold. A comfortable divan was drawn up to an open fireplace where I burnt juniper logs

and white pine and eucalyptus and a small purplish wood called manzanita. The western window had a view of eucalyptus-trees against the Pacific. I will not attempt to describe either the eucalyptus-trees or the Pacific, but merely offer a slight understatement in Jane Austen idiom, that this view was not above half bad. Though oddly enough, the other outlook attracted me far more; it had less of grandeur and highly spectacular sunset stuff about it; if ever a faint shadow lay over me, a plucking at my nerves to the tune of “Dem Studio Blues”, my serenity could be restored as though it had never been damaged, by relaxing in my Master-bedroom in the house (Spanish Style) at Santa Monica, with its open fireplace to burn aromatic logs, and the road of aromatic shrubs and trees and blossom outside. And though, as in the island bedroom on the English river, it might have been associated with horror, for not illness and war but earthquake and danger had happened to me there, I have already forgotten, unless I make a deliberate effort, how the floor heaved and bulged and rolled beneath me and the pictures swayed and tumbled from the walls—as though these were unimportant things, not vitally connected with the room or what lay beyond it.

Perhaps it is as unusual to connect the name of Monte Carlo with a few weeks of a pleasant homely existence in a little hotel on the quiet lower sea-road a hundred miles and more removed from fashion or gambling. Here I sat on the narrow balcony outside my window and watched how *le patron*, M. André, clattered along with trap and horse to market for his vegetables and fruit every morning early; and how a French peasant boy singing, flung water over the *pavé* outside the restaurant and across the road as far as the low sea-wall; and how a waiter (before he put on waiter's garb, bright blue trousers and no shirt) rattled out the awning to protect the little tables presently from the hot sun; and next the fish arrived, to fraternize in a Bouillabaisse or to figure on the menu languidly as “*Demoiselles en déshabille*”; and the fishermen stood in knots gossiping fraternally before they went off to a busy day. And here was the little wine-cart, yes, and here the ice. And now the road was quiet again . . . and the Mediterranean washed just below the sea-wall over the road, and the shadows from the villas lay sharp and black in vivid weather. Out across the bay, exactly opposite my window and balcony, a British battleship lay at anchor, having nothing to do with all this fun and marketing, but also busy enough, for I could hear the distant notes of command to get up, to go to

sleep, to go to their meals, to set watch, to run up flags and haul them down again; and, after each bugle call, tiny active figures rushed about, absorbed in some marionette life consecrated to England Home and Duty . . . all three far enough away from my breakfast on the balcony and Caramello's hotel, and M. André returning again from briskly organizing what would be transformed into exquisite lunches and unbelievable dinners. At the end of a fortnight the battleship sounded a final bugle call and slowly passed away and out of sight. I was surprised that it took nearly a whole day to do this simple act. And at first my view looked a little bare.

Reluctant every morning to go in and dress, for already the tiles of my bedroom were hot with the sun, and the thinnest dressing-gown worn over the thinnest nightgown was enough, I lingered and went on reading "The Third Morality", by Gerald Heard, and that too had little to do with battleships or *les spécialités*, for he advocated a gradual levitation of the spirit till it should no more be concerned with individual pleasure or individual pain. The moral of the book was, I think: "Rise above it" . . .

I meant to return often through the years to this pleasant unpretentious little home-from-home on the lower sea-wall at Monte Carlo. But things happened . . . And in June, 1940, I had a letter from M. André. The stamp and postmark and picture of the hotel on the envelope were so startling at that date, that I opened it fearing to find inside a cry of despair, a cry for help. On the contrary, M. André wrote tranquilly, asking me, with a touch of affectionate reproach, why Madame had not visited them for so long a time? Could she not come now and spend a little holiday and refresh herself with their famous *cuisine*? He remembered how she had enjoyed—and here followed an account of one or two gourmet dishes that (a thousand years ago, it seemed) had literally gone down very well with me. Madame should have her own room, M. André continued; *petit déjeuner* on the balcony; and there she could write as she had always done, with nothing to disturb her. For here is no war, M. André assured me; I could depend upon that . . . "Mlle Olive has been in to see me only yesterday, and we talked of you, and she said you should be here where there is sunshine and rest and above all the so good *cuisine*—I should therefore write to you and suggest it. And I do so in confident hope."

The date on the letter did not seem to justify quite such an invitation, with its further assurances of welcome from all Monte Carlo, from all the French Riviera. He had written during the

last week of May, and I received it a few days before June 17th. I have already mentioned, I think, but will repeat it, that this was the spring of Dunkirk; spring of miracle and catastrophe and miracle again. I read his letter, looking on to a pre-Raphaelite tree of scarlet apples in the little guest-house garden at Brambleford, with a faint blue pencil line of the Downs beyond. And France was falling and would presently fall.

So I have learnt that one should always leave magic to chance and be content to let it flee or stray; never trying to lasso it, pull it into one's life on a noose so that it might be a permanent joy. What I saw from my hotel window on the Kyle of Lochalsh, what I saw from the hotel window some twenty or thirty floors up above Fifth Avenue and the skyscrapers of New York, or from the window of any *châlet* hotel in the mountains of Austria or South Germany (that pine and lake and waterfall view which must always, whatever happens, inspire affection and a poignant tug at the heart) these, it would appear, cannot last, however hard we strive to arrange matters better, pull out our cheque-books and—as Arnold Bennett described in his "Grand Babylon Hotel"—buy the restaurant to be sure of a minute steak for lunch. In the houses where I have lived longest and had some sort of share or ownership (if one can speak of ownership nowadays, or ever, without feeling a little guilty and a little silly!) I cannot remember that any had a view; none which moved me to emotion. For in Holland Park, my London home till I was fourteen, I was fond of the garden itself, its daisies on the lawn (except once a week after the gardener had been), its lilac bushes and may-trees, but fond of it as a child must be, picking the daisies, smelling the lilac, sitting on the grass, or idly pushing to and fro in the swing by one toe scraping the gravel. For a garden was still a place that promised nothing and gave nothing till you were actually *in* it; I never sat at the nursery window and looked out if I were indoors, for then I had the whole kingdom of books to surround me with a more complete because less familiar magic. And when I married and went to live in Cornwall, we spoilt Cornwall from the moment we left the rooms of Mrs. Bosusto's cottage; we had a view from our own house, quite a good view, but not the *right* view. Yes, there is an Ali Baba trick about it all; and if you approach your window with honourable intentions and documents and contracts and so forth, it will not do the trick, but waits for the Open Sesame of a lover who cannot buy. We lived for five years in Italy on top of a hill overlooking the Mediterranean

with a glorious arena of the Maritime Alps behind us in a semi-circle. That, although the cottage was handicapped by being our own, did indeed come nearest to making a full capture of my heart; nearly but not quite; it lost in open competition with the view where I knocked a hole in the wall looking east towards the Downs in the English cottage that I rented furnished only for three months at a time, and held precariously till that day in June, 1942, when I returned there after a brief visit to Kent . . . and Sophia told me sorrowfully that they were to sell the big house and go to live in the cottage themselves. And so, at the end of September—  
—At the end of September I would have to move.

I was not sure if I felt grief or elation on hearing this. Always I am glad when other people burn my boats for me while I hover indecisively with a box of safety-matches; and for some time past I had wondered whether I ought to be lotus-eating, violet-eating, in the country, since my London home was destroyed: if I should not perhaps return to London and find some part-time war-work to do? Still continuing, of course, to work as usual at my own job of writing, partly because I had my living to earn and partly because I knew I was not physically strong enough, after two major operations in 1940, to do a whole-time job. A friend of mine, another writer who evacuated to the same village at the same time as myself when the raids destroyed her home in the same part of London, now declared her similar intention of coming back and dividing her time in the same way. Then followed a revealing little dialogue (I mean, revealing to me about myself). She always wrote in the afternoon and evening, even at night, and could do nothing whatever in the morning; whereas I am a steady morning worker from ten to one, and quite often in the early morning before breakfast. We were both anxious to find an opportunity to be useful together—a touch of pretty shyness, perhaps—and I put forward every effort to persuade her earnestly that really, *really* she could work perfectly well in the mornings; simply a case of making the initial effort, getting her mind adapted to the unaccustomed hours (adaptability, the new major virtue). After the first week or two, I said, she would be working in the morning quite as enthusiastically as in the afternoon, evening or night; one only fancied these things, you see; we are creatures of habit, you see; and she could quite easily destroy what she had written during the first week if it were not up to standard, treating it as a sort of exercise. Not *quite* easily, said my friend, who being of tougher,

more energetic, more enterprising material than myself, usually took the lead, but was showing unexpected pliancy over this question; but she would try, yes, she really would! Not till I was strolling home again down the pleasant country roads of Brambleford, did it occur to me that exactly the same good arguments applied to my own habit of working in the morning, which by a little adaptability and willingness to oblige, and some preliminary effort, might “easily” be shifted to the afternoon or evening . . . It was the case of the Military Tailors and their point of view, all over again.

So I did not wonder, when Sophia told me about leaving the cottage, if I could find another cottage or house in the country, but said to myself as a matter of course: London. I am a Londoner. I was well again, more or less; and the war was still going on; and anyhow I did not want another cottage, I had grown fond of this one—against my inclination, for I know what happens to me whenever I am dragged up by the roots, and how much trouble I give to everyone around me, and how I insist that I can never, never be happy again anywhere else. To think of moving during the fig-time of the year, leaving my window, leaving Sophia to whom I was devoted, leaving my early morning awakening to a symphony of bird-song.

And thinking of birds brought me, literally, to consider Josephine, who now came running to meet me with her characteristic *brrr* of welcome, an expressive sound, to be interpreted as: “So here you are, back again! Why, you’ve been away for weeks. I didn’t miss you at all, for reasons we needn’t go into now; still, I’m glad to see you. It makes company in the garden and a lap in the house” . . . She wove invisible patterns round and round me, rubbing against my legs. Josephine was absolutely beautiful; a black semi-Persian with a shimmer of russet over her fur, a wide black ruff, deep glowing golden eyes—I never really knew what gold could mean till I saw it there with life behind the gold. She did not exploit her looks, for like all cats of character and not mere parasites for food, during twenty hours out of the twenty-four, she was indifferent to me (her mistress) or to any other human being. Her indifference was positive, not negative: Josephine walking towards you—and then straight past, bent on her own independent errand, offered a salutary comment on your own lack of charm compared with whatever jolly business she had in mind.

I had better define clearly my angle of approach to the little lives



of the animals surrounding me at Herbert's Cottage. "Little" as applied here, is an adjective pure and simple, not an attempt on my part to cadge sentiment for their helpless dependence. If I kept a herd of dinosaurs, ichthyosauri, centaurs, sphinx and rhinoceroses on the premises, naturally I should not have written of their "little lives", but small dogs and kittens and cats do in actual fact live a life reduced to scale, ankle-high, knee-high, but no more, from our point of view. Equally, an elephant might write a charming narrative of humans and their little lives.

Flattered at my welcome, though not deceived, I bent to scratch Josephine behind the ears while she purred and *brurred* and went on weaving—and then, suddenly bored with caresses, shot away and lay crouching among the white border of tobacco-plant, her tail slowly lashing to and fro, pointed teeth glinting, small red tongue just visible as she did that jungle chatter which always rather frightened me on behalf of the birds swooping to and from the lawn and the pear-trees and the small Italian oak that shadowed the pool in the rock-garden.

"Ought she to be leaving her kitten already?" I asked Sophia, but idly, knowing that it was not a question with Josephine of ought or ought not. She had had her very first bunch of kittens on the day before I left to go to Kent; being, as one might say poetically, still in the spring and blossom-time of her girlhood; and indeed, no alluring young girl who valued her lissom figure could have been as disgusted as Josephine during those weeks when to her bewilderment nature slowed her up . . . slowed up her fun, slowed up her nimbleness and grace, loaded her down with a heavy burden. Well—we drowned six kittens and buried them efficiently under the pear-trees, and left Tommy, a random but we hoped lucky selection to comfort the disconsolate mother. Disconsolate, hell! Josephine mewed for about half an hour and then forgot; and even during the day or two we spent with her before leaving, she only bothered about Tommy when one of us picked him up for investigation (one must investigate) when she appeared in a flash and in a temper, roughly to lick away the contamination of our touch on her infant son. I trust I have made it plain that Josephine was a little horror; she fascinated me by her vitality; beauty alone could not have done it. Josephine did not pause to enjoy life, she was life itself, that unsolicited gift, the celebration, the spark, the will, the urgency, the absorption in every moment and every movement for its own sake without

regard to past or future. I myself lack vitality in functional daily life, so that I appreciate it more passionately than any other quality in those who dwell near and around me. It is curious that whatever you may say against my work, nearly all critics and (or) friends refer to my unflagging abundant vitality, especially in my Rakonitz family books; insist on this vitality; sometimes deplore it where it leads to a lack of form and a superfluity of words and characters and themes . . . As I happen to have no vitality at all, I never hesitate to exploit a shameless theory (which may be true) that it all pours away into my books and so I have none left for every day . . . and that would explain (wouldn't it?) my reluctance to be the first to fetch things, to wash up, to stay up late, set out on a long walk. What a welcome we give anything that will clear up the mystery of why one is or what one is.

Perhaps the same convenient theory might account for my passion for water and boats . . . Water that supports you without effort, and boats where you may sit and paddle for hours without moving and yet without incurring reproach for laziness. Account also for my love of gardens without gardening; if someone says “garden” to me when perforce I am in a room in a city, I at once see a place of green shade with a stream, and sunshine outside the shade, and I sit within it, sit or lie at ease, in a hammock, on the grass, in a deck-chair; I like to eat and drink in a garden, sometimes to write or anyhow to plan writing, to read, to talk with a friend, sitting together in a garden; but most of all to lie there at peace and watch bird life and dog life and bee life, all going about their business with passionate vitality, unaware of me. One *must* lie or sit in a garden, unless it is raining. Rooms, in summer, thrust you out again the moment you wander in. And I like, too, to mooch round a garden at stated times, before breakfast, directly after breakfast, in the evening at dusk, missing nothing, noting progress, aware of the sharp bluish-silver shimmer on a teazle ball before each spike spreads into tiny blue blossom, comparing it with the same season last year, familiarity and marvels intertwined, and myself a happy initiate . . . Oh, a sort of absorbed mooching. And I like what I can get out of a garden. Naturally I do. Nor am I claiming that it needs a rare type to enjoy very young broad beans, very young green peas, very crisp cos lettuces; and to pick up and bite into that Worcester Pearmain just tumbled on to the crisp wet grass; and to gather armfuls of flowers to fill all the bowls and jugs and clear glass vases. It is hateful to be without

a garden; there is nowhere to sit or to mooch, and little that is good to smell—unless you happen to be beside the sea; I can do without a garden then.

But what especially surprised me when I went to live at Brambleford and not simply there on a visit, was the discovery that all my friends who worked in their gardens and loved them and knew them, never sat in them. They sat indoors. When they had sat a brief while, they went into the garden and worked again. My desire for a chair in the shade or a chair in the sun was kindly humoured because writers are indolent creatures who can provide books but little else; there was, however, always a slight difficulty in finding a suitable chair; it had to be rummaged out of the barn, creaking and dilapidated, whereas my own deck-chairs were honoured, comfortable and available. But here again my lack of vitality would possibly explain the difference between me and my gardening friends; one must perhaps lack vitality to appreciate sitting in gardens.

So wondering what I should do without a garden if I went to London, I only half heard something that Sophia was telling me . . . Then enlightenment vanquished absence of mind. What she was saying was of extreme importance; it was also a severe shock:

Josephine, with her kitten only three weeks old, was mating again.

It did not need the higher mathematics to make me realize in a flash that dear dear little Josephine's delight in life for its own sake, the wilfulness of that spark within her, would bring her nicely up to a second delivery of kittens in the very month we had to move.

## CHAPTER IV

### QUEER ABOUT EGGS!

WHILE Josephine was fulfilling herself, as we used to say in the good old days of "Ann Veronica" and Free Love, the middle-aged cat in the big house next door—Sophia's house—was also fulfilling herself for about the thirty-third time. That the birth of her kittens coincided with Josephine's was of no importance to anyone except poor Jessie. Poor Jessie was Sophia's

Skye terrier; her kennel name was Shepherd's Warning. She was very very old; during her fourteen years, by force of personality she had acquired many nicknames, such as the Aunt of England, the Dowager Duchess, the Minor Prophet, and the Scapegoat (Holman Hunt). The Minor Prophet was my own contribution; at each of her melancholy appearances by one of the many gates between our two gardens, by her general air of wretchedness in the face of impending disaster, I expected to see her throw up her paws to the sky, cast her loin-cloth and wail: "Woe! Woe! Woe unto Brambleford! Woe unto Ruston Copthall and South Danesbury . . ." A cousin staying with me there for the first time, remarked at breakfast that she had seen a rather fussy and at the same time dignified dowager duchess strolling round the flower-beds studying each bloom through her lorgnettes. We had not the slightest difficulty in realizing whom she meant. As for the Scapegoat, with apologies to the pre-Raphaelites, the original Scapegoat was undoubtedly a Skye terrier, and undoubtedly Jessie herself spending a short spell of her previous existence as a Symbol beside the Dead Sea.

Jessie is dead. She had never been effusive, but she had tolerated me and accepted my presence in the cottage which was just as much hers as the house, and certainly more hers than mine. I never took liberties with her, yet once, just once when I was not looking, I felt her tongue softly but deliberately lick my hand; and I was deeply moved. Directly after her death, Sophia very wisely went straight to the same kennels to choose another Skye terrier; not to fill the gap, but to give herself plenty to think about. Jessie's niece had recently had a litter, and presently Jessie's great-niece, Little Jessie, arrived in a basket and in a state of feverish excitement which has lasted ever since. Now we spend our time regretfully murmuring: "How different from her dear great-aunt!" Little Jessie is an unholy terror. She has no dignity; the word woe is not in her vocabulary; her diet consists (it would seem) of slippers and ankles; she squirms, she leaps, she scrabbles, she plunges, she gallops up and down stairs, she endangers life; her irrepressible habits require a rapid series of diagrams. She is more silvery than Old Jessie and perhaps more beautiful; her ears are incredibly long but only one of them follows the normal course of gravity and flaps over at the tip. All her best ideas are unrestful. Every morning while I am staying with Sophia at the cottage which is no longer mine, I race Little Jessie to the bathroom and slam the

door in her face. Then I sink down breathless on the rim of the bath and meditate sadly on her dear dear great-aunt: *How different!*

It was settled between Sophia and myself that I should never say to Little Jessie: "Come to Auntie" or "Come to Mummie"—but "Come to Miss Stern", and so put matters on a proper respectful footing from the start.

But during that summer of 1942, when Old Jessie still wandered sadly between kitchen and kitchen and was welcome in neither, Little Jessie did not exist even in the realm of pure thought. Nevertheless the local birth-rate in domestic animals sprang up in a night . . . Shepherd's Warning simply could not understand what devilish things had happened when oscillating from one back-door to another, from house to cottage and from cottage to house, at the first approach of her paw and smell (both hitherto treated with the utmost respect) militant motherhood sprang at her in a spitting screaming arch of fury and drove her forth again to get the same reception from simultaneous motherhood. No, that was not poor Jessie's happiest period. It did not last long; quite soon Josephine was to become bored with her sole remaining kitten; presently Josephine and Jessie met on the lawn again with an indifferent: "No offence meant"; "And none taken, I'm sure."

I enjoy watching universal life reduced to scale, and it is easier to watch it in cats than in dogs, because dogs are nearly always more urgent and more affectionate; they batter in on your daily life with such violent personal impact, whereas a cat goes about her occasions without your aid except for the regular supply of a few material comforts; without your hindrance except for your irritating human custom of shutting doors and leaving her on the wrong side of them. Kipling knew about cats as he knew about dogs: "I am the cat that walks by itself" is an immortal phrase; I am not so sure of its continuance: "And all places are alike to me"; in sheer fact, he is wrong: a cat has a deeper sense of place than a dog: she will reject or accept it with more fastidious disdain if wrong; and if according to her own mysterious standard, right, she will settle down and visibly accept it by sensuous shivers and stretchings and trampling out invisible grapes by kneading paws that voluptuously open and close as though to some ritual cat-rhythm which we cannot hear; eyes out of which the glowing light gradually recedes, leaving dead slits . . . Trampling and stretching gradually cease and all life subsides into comfort and

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purring. If this performance should happen on your bed or on your lap, you yourself likewise exist as nothing but Place, and any sign from you that you regard yourself otherwise is treated with such resentment that you cower and are ashamed and unworthy.

A dog can make you ashamed only by his decency and goodness, but a cat achieves it by silent coercion. To live in the same house with a baby and see it urgently alive and engrossed in living, is not possible without mixing it up with oneself in a possessive sort of way, and that destroys the fun at once: you either have to live with a baby and *want* it to love you, or alternatively it is no more than a nuisance of noise and claims. You either have to love a dog, or alternatively it remains as a barking entity that eternally demands to be taken for a walk while you have important things to do at home. But a cat, as small or smaller and equally enchanting to watch, not really caring either for your love or for your company on a walk, brings universal life within your easy range of vision. I have already freed myself, I hope, of the charge of sentimentality towards cats in general and Josephine in particular, by stating that she was not particularly fond of me, though sometimes gracious enough to lie curled against my neck, one paw pushed out on that curve of endearing helplessness (helpless my foot!). I was fascinated, flattered, but never deluded; my moment of real cat sentimentality was over that apocryphal little fellow who liked watching tennis at Wimbledon because, as he wistfully observed: "My Dad's in that racket!"

If you possess a dog, a walk-without-dog is sheer holiday and escape; it is, in fact, a walk. Whereas a walk *with* dog amounts to an hour or two of vigilance and shouts, panic and reliefs; of placating farmers ("Your dog . . . My winter wheat!") and mothers of frightened children ("But he never bites . . . Adores children . . . Wants her to play with him, that's all!"); of tearing him out of enjoyable (sic) fights; of running when you have no wish to run, pausing when you have no wish to pause, bursting your lungs with calling to him as he lies flat, panting a little and thumping his tail, in the middle of the highway just where the cars come roaring round the bend; of taking your shoes through muddy swamps in pursuit of his rapturously swishing tail far ahead, seeing beauty but not seeing it, losing irretrievably noble thoughts on nature, almost before they are born; of beating him when you have no heart to beat, averting your gaze from the reproach in those sad but still loving amber eyes—"But my dear, that dog

isn't even *trained*! You *must* or you'll never etc." . . .) of water shaken over you from spaniel or terrier (spaniels are the wettest): of being badgered for sticks to be thrown, stones to be thrown, gloves to be thrown, anything to be thrown . . . "*Must* you take that filthy old boot home? That disgusting tin can? That obscene tramp's hat?" At last past the goat, past the heifers, past the hens, past the sheep safely—and: "Oh hell! What *is* he eating now?"

I recently went without a dog on the walk which he had already made familiar as a cheerful obstacle-race. It was not so homelike without him, but regained a quality of glamour and discovery. I came to some hayricks on the rim of a field high above the Kentish Weald. It was accident that my approach should have been so silent that it gave no enemy warning to a company of little field-rats playing their incautious games to and fro, in and out of their holes from rick to rick; and indeed I was no enemy, but halted and stood there quietly watching them for at least twenty minutes. They played Touch, Leap-frog, Last Across and Tom Tiddler's Ground, whisking from sunshine to cool shade . . . Here again was a world reduced to fable size, but being no La Fontaine, I could enjoy the field-rats' rustle and scamper without having to search for a moral, as in:

"Autrefois le rat de ville  
Invita le rat des champs,  
D'une façon fort civile,  
A des reliefs d'ortolans. . . ."

"Des reliefs d'ortolans"—tit-bits of ortolans! one imagines them as the rat-equivalent to a gourmet's paradise, an epicure's caviare, a connoisseur's "See Naples and Die"—but probably *le rat des champs* (Giles Hayseed) visiting the city would just as soon have made do with a boiled egg and a bit of cheese.

As eggs were once.

I am convinced that since the first year of this war, people in Britain have pathologically gone queer about eggs . . . in the same way as they went queer about tulips at the time of the Great Tulip Bubble. The Great Tulip Bubble was a subject that always fascinated me, when neither gold counted, nor diamonds, and only bulbs and bulbs and bulbs stood for sudden riches and sudden poverty. I was getting sixpence a week when I first read about the Great Tulip Bubble and realized that my sixpence was

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in itself only a symbol, and might at a different date have had a greater purchasing power had it been a Philippe de Commynes.

When the common egg which we have always taken as a matter of course (eggs and bacon, an egg to your tea, an egg on your haddock, and "scrambled eggs will do if you haven't got anything else") was gradually sucked below the surface of life and seen no more, and then in June, 1941, was rationed and welcomed on its reappearance like the first rare blossom of Persephone overdue, it symbolized all over England our first daily realization of something that money could no longer buy for us. The lack of eggs felt somehow more complete and more exasperating than even the scarcity of meat or the tiny dole of butter or oranges-and-lemons as a beautiful legend as well as a child's game. For it occurred in every class: men, women and children, in town and in the country, slowly, day by day, became . . . queer about eggs.

They began to figure as rich gifts and courtship, bribes and propitiation. By our new topsy-turvy set of values, if in 1942 a box labelled "Eggs" should prove only to contain jewellery, we were furious; but absolutely delighted if on the contrary, a Bond Street jeweller's box registered and sealed should when opened contain that better thing, a hen's egg or a duck's egg or a bantam's egg, nestling in pink cotton-wool. Beauty and the Beast could be re-written up-to-date with the two elder daughters saying as before: "Bring us, dear Father, emeralds and rubies and a fur coat from your travels." But Beauty, doing her bogus modest piece, plumping just for a brown egg: "That's *all* I want, dear Daddy!" And of course he could not find one anywhere, and the search led him into the Beast's garden . . . The same search has led many of us into a beast's garden; people *are* such beasts about eggs! And do you remember the courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo: Just as in the first fine careless rapture of Freud, Greek Drama was interpreted by light of his research into mental obscurities, so can Edward Lear be read again nowadays with the stress laid upon our present catering frenzies, and on the "Milk-white Hens of Dorking" that belonged to Lady Jingly-Jones, which the Yonghy might well have thought a dowry beyond price, and the owner of the hens worth wooing with all the sob-stuff at his command:

On the Coast of Coromandel,  
Shrimps and watercresses grow,  
Prawns are plentiful and cheap,  
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo.



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

You shall have my chairs and candle  
And my jug without a handle !  
Gaze upon the rolling deep  
(Fish is plentiful and cheap ;)  
As the sea, my love is deep !  
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo,  
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo.

But the Lady Jingly-Jones, too simple to be coldly sarcastic about his wishful thinking with regard to the fish outlook, had to confess, twirling her fingers madly, that she was already married and there was nothing doing :

Mr. Jones—(his name is Handel,—  
Handel Jones, Esquire, and Co.)  
Dorking fowls delights to send,  
Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo !  
Keep, oh ! keep your chairs and candle,  
And your jug without a handle,—  
I can merely be your friend !  
—Should my Jones more Dorkings send,  
I will give you three, my friend !

which was the wildest generosity, and really not quite cricket, for Mr. Handel Jones, Esquire, and Co. would hardly be likely to send her his Dorking Hens if he knew she were going to give them away to her bogus-elloquent suitors. A strange story, anyhow. Why had the Handel Joneses separated ? Why had she gone to live in Coromandel ? Not, certainly, because hers was an independent temperament, despising men ; for reading between the lines, it comes out in the text that she was of a weak and clinging wee-wifey disposition and the suburbs her natural milieu. As for the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, in the penultimate verse he reveals himself as not only a fortune-hunter, but a war-escapist :

Through the silent-roaring ocean  
Did the Turtle swiftly go ;  
Holding fast upon his shell  
Rode the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo.  
With a sad primeval motion  
Towards the sunset isles of Boshen . . .

Queer about eggs. People who have never before lied or even prevaricated, lucky people who keep hens, will hasten to tell you (should the danger-word arise) that their hens are not laying, that they are broody, that they have only given five eggs in the last three weeks—or was it four ? Yes, it was only four—and three had to be sent away to an invalid aunt and the rest to the Govern-

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ment and one of them was cracked and had to be scrambled at once . . . Truthful people, usually; but their faces grow strained and queer over eggs, and probably your own face also has grown strained and queer and your voice elaborately casual; and there are silences—especially in winter—white silences, brown silences, speckled silences, elliptical silences, ovular silences.

The best egg-conversations are between people who are all without hope of the extra egg. It was during the very worst shortage, when we were saying passionately: "What's the good of *one once* a month? I'd rather have none and just remember them", while the 'flu epidemic of December, 1942, was raging, that three of us were lunching together and Irene told us the saddest story in the world: She had had 'flu (and no cook, of course) and no appetite, but an egg had drifted into the house, and as she lay there convalescent, she began to think: "To-morrow I might fancy an egg", and she decided that she would scramble it (a mistake, I thought, but she liked them best that way) and making that great decision brought her sleep, and on waking refreshed but very very weak, before she was fully conscious she knew that something nice was going to happen: it was to be a red-letter day—(but who wants a red letter?) . . . And presently she got up from her bed and assembled the egg and broke it reverently, and she had a little lump of butter and she began to scramble, and then she sprinkled a little pepper and then the pepper-pot lid fell off—

The pepper-pot lid fell off.

"Yes, *stiff* with pepper," said Irene. "It had been refilled . . . No, nothing to be done. I cried."

Then in my turn I began to relate how a lady good and noble and generous had a little while ago sent me a goose's egg. I ate it fried for the sake of feeling that I had a fried egg which went on three times longer than usual . . . But Irene was crying more than ever, so to divert her thoughts from eggs in the singular, I started a fantasy supposing that eggs should become currency in place of money. "A bit difficult over giving change," suggested Irene. I argued: "But there need be no change; egg currency would simplify everything in a simplified world. Goose eggs would be our largest coin—no, not roc's eggs, they are probably apocryphal, and what could one buy afterwards with an apocryphal roc's egg?—but goose eggs, duck eggs, hen eggs, pullet eggs, bantam eggs, gull's eggs, plover's eggs and sturgeon's eggs—"

The rarest egg, I went on, could represent a £10 note—"Then mightn't it be easier to stick to £10 notes? Suppose you wanted to tip and had no loose eggs in your pocket—" "But you *don't* tip in a simplified world; you say, 'Thanks, old man, you know I'd do the same for you any time'; that's *better* than a tip."

But by now I had become a bit doubtful myself; for it seemed to me that hens by this new currency might have to bear too heavy a burden of psychological pressure; they would become a sacred bird like the cat or the ibis or the golden calf; other farm-yard animals would get together and have indignation meetings: "Hens—I ask you, *hens*! And they're quite insufferable lately with all this going on!" Hens, even the respectable ones, would get followed in the street. And what would happen if they got egg-bound? Something like frozen assets? And after eggs had been passed from hand to hand, might not eating them go out of fashion altogether? "It's like eating gold", people would say. No end to the somewhat sinister speculations which arose from my first not at all impractical suggestion.

Returning from Erewhon to the world of facts as they were in 1942 and onwards, how many of our friends who used to hate hens and dilate on their wholly unlovable qualities, now keep them, though shamefacedly and as far as possible out of sight of the house; and continue to hate the beasts; to talk with loathing of their hard beaks, their scaly claws, their stringy necks, their irritating peck as they walk, the ragged bits of nonsense that grow on the tops of their heads; their total lack of warmth, charm or gratitude. One can grow fond of a duck, most certainly one can; a duck is comedy bordering on farce. One can get fond of goats (what can be the origin of the phrase "He gets my goat"? I looked it up in the dictionary, but could only find: Hardy lively wanton strong-smelling usually horned and bearded ruminant). But fond of turkeys and hens, *never*. And yet the egg itself is a perfect object: not "nearly perfect" like so many achievements of nature, but completely perfect in shape, texture and colour. Would a hen know that? Not she; a hen is one of those authors of whom their admirers say: "I always feel it's better *not* to meet them in private life."

This new race of *malgrés-eux* hen-keepers, these twelve-hen-look women created by desperation, are often puzzled by the mysterious behaviour of their unwanted boarders. Laying aside the *Tatler* or the *New Statesman*, they surreptitiously study the Poultry-

keeper's weekly organ in perpetual endeavour to find out what to do with their skinny scratching horrors when they go broody, when they refuse to sit on their eggs, when they refuse to observe any chalk-line restrictions on their Wanderlust. Far from proudly repeating anecdotes to show the cuteness and sweetness of their little ones, as mothers do, hen-keepers seem to take wilful pleasure, on the contrary, in relieving their pent-up dislike by relating incidents that show up the stupidity, the obstinacy, the treachery, the vileness of their hens at the bottom of the garden. They are particularly bitter at the ugly cunning of those fowls who haven't laid an egg since I don't know when, and are sentenced to be roasted (or anyhow steamed for the casserole) and somehow get wind of it and start laying again—but as rarely as they possibly can and only just enough to earn a reprieve.

Throughout the first year of the war a certain novel kept appearing, written along what was apparently an irresistible formula; as for so many years the Bridge of San Luis Rey had begun the formula for using broken bridges, Grand Hotels, Luxury Liners, four-thirties from Victoria, and many other post-Chaucer and post-Boccaccio devices to link lives and stories which would otherwise have had no possible connection one with another. Our new formula I would call the Village-in-Wartime novel. Personally I never grew tired of them, and eagerly gathered them as fast as they fell, leaves in an autumnal gale. They were my happiest form of escape fiction, and I expect I only refrained from writing one myself, not from any superior highbrow motive, but simply because I wanted to continue enjoying them as an objective pleasure. I suppose I read about forty; they were usually extremely well written. If, misled by a title, I got hold of a volume that turned out after all not to be the Village-in-Wartime Book, I was genuinely disappointed and inclined to complain that they should not trifle with so pretty and innocent a passion as this one of mine.

Here were the basic ingredients of the earlier batches, allowing for a year of war to have passed while they were in preparation: An English village in a more or less safe area, because of bringing in the humours of the Evacuee Problem treated with comic bewilderment, constant good temper and touches of alternate pathos and farce; it offered most scope if the evacuees were a whole family from cockney London. After Evelyn Waugh's winsome trio in

"Put Out More Flags", evacuees were quietly withdrawn from circulation. Included in this first period were the humours of the Black-out (*lots* about the Black-out) and Fifth Column scares (the wrong man was suspected and then the real fellow was caught; that was fun). The further humours of petrol-rationing and the poignancy of hen-keeping, a scatter of through-the-looking-glass incidents in the Home Guard, home-made shelters and home-anti-invasion measures did not start till the second batch, which also included the humours of War Weapons Week. The author could approach her theme from the angle of the residents, proud of their village though often exasperated by the villagers' stubborn adhesion to character, hospitable towards evacuees of all kinds and classes, brave and adaptable beyond all measure, as they certainly were in truth when the strain came, the test, the jerk at the cord by air-raid and bad news. Or the same formula could be used equally well from the point of view of the sophisticated person who had never lived in the country before, and who gratefully discovers for herself the humanities that lie behind "quaint rusticity". Always a love motif, of course, in the Village-in-Wartime book; but these, though pleasant and moving, were but servants to the Love of England motif on which they were built. Very little sob-stuff, a little more snob-stuff, and perhaps rather too much amusing dialogue . . . And here, more or less, was the story as I like it, as you like it—if you like it? For months and months now, I have not found a new one, and though I love "Cranford", it is not at all the same thing.

Nevertheless, myself, by reasons of health and incendiary bombs, banished to a village for the first three years of the war, or rather to two villages, Brambleford and Ruston Copthall, I still think it odd that I never tired of reading the Village-in-Wartime book. For these villages in Berks and Bucks, in Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Cambridgeshire, inland in Kent and Sussex and Hampshire, these villages all over England are pungently individual and yet curiously interchangeable. They represent, as I remarked before over domestic animals, universal life reduced to a scale where it is easy to see what is going on and what it is all about.

This is especially true of war: take the smallest quarrel in a family or between friends or in village politics, and watch your local *casus belli* swell out and expand till it covers the world, the Atlantic and the Pacific, the Arctic and the Mediterranean; then, if it interests you and helps you to realize why wars happen, let it

shrink again till it becomes a short novel—about an umbrella, for instance, the best book Hugh Walpole ever gave us: "Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill": The elderly schoolmaster, Mr. Perrin, who knew he was a failure; the young popular football Blue, Mr. Traill, with all his career before him; they quarrelled ostensibly because Mr. Traill borrowed Mr. Perrin's old umbrella without asking him, but it spread and spread outwards till the whole school and the whole teaching staff were involved, and it ended by the insanity of hate and attempted murder, and the sanity of sacrifice and heroism and death. It was an enlightening book, worth remembering whenever one might be in danger of minding too much over the umbrella's equivalent. And "Foe-Farrell", by Quiller-Couch: that was more consciously a story of war reduced to scale; a story with a moral. Foe was fundamentally a bad man, Farrell fundamentally a good man. They quarrelled . . . and gradually so that you could hardly perceive what was happening, Farrell became a bad man too; as bad as Foe. And because each was obsessed by hate, with everything else cut out that might make a difference between them, and because hate is a common denominator, they ended as the same man: Foe-Farrell.

Casus belli: I was once sitting between a happily married pair, and I asked the husband his opinion of a certain book; he replied lightly: "Oh, I hadn't time to finish it. My wife reads much quicker than I do and always sends back the library books before I'm half-way through." It may be simply because I am a novelist, but I seemed aware of just a tiny splinter in his voice which should not have been there; of a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. I visualized him coming home after a harassing day's work and looking forward so happily to picking up that Interesting Novel; opening it at the chapter where he had reluctantly broken off late last night in bed . . . "What are you looking for, Harry? Your book? Oh, I sent it back this morning with mine. I'd finished both, and you weren't a quarter way through. I've *never* known anyone read so slowly . . ." And a week later: "My dear, *please*, if you *could* manage to control your lust for sending books back to the library, let me find this one at home till I've finished it, otherwise" he might add pleasantly, "I might murder you!" And ripples of laughter: "Oh Harry darling, of *course*! I can keep on changing only mine. I'm sorry I was so impatient last time." "All right, my fault for being such an old plodder!" (They would both still be amiable at this stage.) Now let us

forget them for a fortnight, and then go back: He is *still* reading that Interesting Novel; it is a long novel, called something about the Sun or the Wind. She has changed hers five or six times since then, but she is such a swift reader that frequently she comes to the last page on the same evening that she began, too late to change it again before the morning. She is very fond of reading: they are both fond of reading. She sits and watches him; at last she can control herself no longer:

"How far have you got?"

"What? Oh, page 172."

"That doesn't convey anything." (Looking over his shoulder.) "Good Lord, Harry, that's only where he comes back for the first time! You *must* have got further than *that*!"

"If I had" (patiently) "I should be reading further than that, shouldn't I?"

"At this rate, you'll be another fortnight."

"What if I am? It isn't compulsory to finish by a certain date, is it?"

"Simply that I've nothing to read. But you wouldn't mind about *that*."

"Why? What's wrong with yours? What's it called? Something about the moon..."

"I got through that in an hour; less than an hour."

"You couldn't have read it in that time. The trouble with you is that you skip." (He returns to his book and becomes once more engrossed.)

But that is not the trouble with her. She does not skip. She never skips. She scorns people who skip.

Aware of her sitting there watching him when he eventually turns a page, he says not so patiently:

"Haven't we anything in the house for you to read?"

"What do you mean, haven't we anything in the house?"

"I mean an old book. Personally, I enjoy re-reading an old favourite."

"Then you'd better personally re-read one, and I can take yours back to the library..."

It does not occur to either of them that the solution to a problem of increasing tension is to have a subscription not for two, but for four books: three for her and one for him. The obvious and simple does, in truth, very rarely occur to people rushing madly downhill towards divorce or homicide. Or war.

A woman spending a week-end with her married friend in the country, on her return rang up to say that she had left behind her something of keen importance to herself (though not actually valuable) such as her engagement-book, her address-book or her cheque-book. Politely apologetic, she asked for it to be sent back at once, registered. It was sent back at once *unregistered*, but arrived quite safely. When indignantly charged with carelessness, the married friend said her husband had said it was not necessary to register.

"I don't know what he *means* by not necessary! It was vitally necessary to me that my book shouldn't be lost. I should be absolutely *done* if it were lost. That's why I particularly asked you to register it. And you didn't."

"But it wasn't lost, so it didn't matter that I didn't."

"But it *might* have been lost."

"But it wasn't. What's the use of getting in a state over what might have happened."

"I'm not in a state. Anybody would be in a state when they think of their address-book careering round the country and never seeing it again."

"John said it was only necessary to register valuables, and that your address-book was of no value to anyone except yourself."

"I'm afraid I don't care *what* John said. I said I wanted it registered. I'd have paid for it, naturally." (Plenty of space to swing a cat in *that* little argument!)

"You're wandering from the *point*. Naturally I wouldn't have minded paying a few pence, but John said it wasn't necessary."

"*I don't care what John said!* John doesn't happen to be my husband and I don't happen to think him Lord God Almighty. The point is that my address-book might have been lost, sent off like that, and it's quite irreplaceable."

"But it wasn't lost and you don't have to replace it. You can't work up a quarrel over what might have happened and hasn't. John *said* it would be quite safe."

"The fact remains . . ."

"The fact remains, my sweet, that you left it here, and I sent it back and you've got it and it's simply silly to go on like this just because you don't like John."

From here, of course, anything might happen.

Casus belli.

Granted, then, that family life, domestic life, animal life, village



life are just the doings of the world reduced in size and retained in a framework convenient for watching, I discovered, during the three years I lived in the country, a hundred incidents as promising as these, all with a dangerous lead to war.

War, a rapid inflammation of anger and injury from one absurd infinitesimal spark . . . a forest fire . . . scorched country for years afterwards. Rationalization of motive for aggression, allies enlisted, allies not knowing when to shut their mouths, the hope of peace if only just one small thing had been left unsaid or undone . . .

But as Brambleford, and later on, Ruston Copthall, and now Brambleford again, are my villages, I am not assembling these into a Village Book, or into this book. From "somewhere in England," however, I have chosen one tragic little painting of cruelty and loneliness and lack of understanding; but so suddenly and vividly illumined at the end, that it blazes like a miracle of living green, a tree in young leaf against the dead greys and sooty black of London stone, always infinitely more startling and lovely than a tree among other green trees in the country.

Young Carrots arrived more or less at the same time as the other evacuee children from the cities, when the early bombing drove them out. But he seemed isolated from the rest, who were fairly tough and quick-witted and found plenty to do. This thin frightened little evacuee appeared quite negative except for his terror of the others; that was positive enough. They used to chase him with stinging-nettles. When he eventually found sturdy protection with Miss A., he was very nearly stupid and witless. The boys who had chased him, charged with what they had done, gave as their excuse that they had never actually *hit* him with the nettles, only chased him. They had not the imagination to realize how far worse that was, for the hunted. To be hit by stinging-nettles would have proved it no such dreadful matter. Yet even then, there is something about nettles, nettles and thorns when they inflict hurt upon you, more fearful to a child than fist-pummelling or the back of a hairbrush. Thorns fester, and nettles leave you feeling sore and vulnerable long after the smart has died away. They are symbols as well as weapons: Nature herself, whom perhaps you had trusted, turning against you to inflict sting and humiliation and outrage. To be chased with stinging-nettles . . .

Anyhow, Miss A. rescued him, and he spent much of his time just sitting with her and feeling safe. They would not dare touch him while Miss A. was within call; she knew how to deal with

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them. His mother helped in the village chores, but she too was an evacuee, a stranger who might also be frightened and helpless. Once the scourge was removed, we wondered what sort of a little boy this was? what were his reactions now that he had ceased to be a victim? Recovery was slow; he rarely spoke; most material provided for his interest or entertainment or education left him listless. Only one thing marked him, and this was hardly an endearing trait: he cared about money. Cared too much. All his questions were about money, saving money, grubbing coins, never spending or giving. Money—who had it? what did they do with it? how did they acquire it? He could become animated over that, then subside again. An embryo miser, then? Queer at that age; unchildlike; not really a nice little boy . . .

Suddenly, after a brief visit from his father, a corporal on embarkation leave, the reason for his sordid little preoccupation burst out clearly into the open: He adored his father and he believed in propaganda. Money, in his mind, meant savings stamps, defence bonds, war-weapons, victory and the end of the war. Money, therefore, quite simply meant his father back again. With single-minded burning intensity he cared for money because it could work this miracle. Here in him was the perfect reception area for the message of the posters designed to halt and arrest attention, to stab to wakefulness the conscience of the rich and unpatriotic who might be blithely spending or callously hoarding: "This Means *You*!"—Intended, perhaps, for dilution of one-eighth strength to seven-eighths of watery indifference; but the little derelict with his occasional halfpenny and his passionate longing for the war to end, took it full strength; accepting it literally as though it were Holy Writ. Strange thing, propaganda; but a great relief and a great gladness to discover love and faith like a tree in young leaf among the dead greys and sooty black of war and hate.

## CHAPTER V

### "FIVE FOR THE SYMBOLS AT YOUR DOOR"

IN my mind I always called him Carrots after I heard this moving explanation of how he had translated money hard and cold, a row of figures not amounting to a row of pins, into the return of a father, alive, warm and reassuring; alive because the war had

ended in time, and had only ended because everybody believed the posters on the wall and rushed to lend in defence of the right to be free.

But why Carrots? "Carrots, Just a Little Boy," by Mrs. Molesworth, one of the first story-books I remember, a story that I have never forgotten; I think chiefly for its startling announcement in Chapter One, that Carrots and his sister Floss never played with wooden spades and gaily-painted tin buckets, because "they lived by the seaside". I wondered, in that case, how they managed to build sand-castles for the game: "I'm King of the Castle, And *you're* the Dirty Rascal"—sung by the child dancing in triumph on the summit? An insolent primitive jingle, unworthy of democracy's future generation. But nearly all the games that children prefer, are savage games of privilege. And furthermore I wondered in an awed sort of way—"Could people indeed *live* by the seaside?"—instead of going to Broadstairs for six glorious weeks every summer and then back to London again:—(fine sand in a heartbreaking trickle from your plimsolls when they were unpacked). And granted this bliss, almost frightening in its topsy-turvy from the order of things as they were, surely, surely Mrs. Molesworth must have been wrong over Carrots and Floss caring nothing for buckets and spades? Carrots as I remember him was a grave little boy, with some of the honesty and logic so endearing in Lewis Carroll's Alice; that was why he was so terribly distressed when accused of stealing half a sovereign and hoarding it in his paint-box. "A *half* sovereign?" he kept on repeating; "a *half* sovereign? I never saw any broken in halves." And then—green leaf breaking through the sombre grey again—Floss his sister suddenly understood and proclaimed the truth: that sovereigns, to Carrots, stood only for the Sovereigns of England: a set of pictures of the heads of all the English kings and queens from William the Conqueror down to Queen Victoria, from which Floss learnt her history lessons. So there couldn't be *half* a sovereign, could there? And when there was all that fuss and to-do about his mother having lost half a sovereign, of course Carrots denied having seen it; though all the while the "yellow sixpenny" which he had picked up from the floor lay safely hidden away among the ultramarine, burnt sienna and crimson lake, waiting to be transformed into the most sumptuous doll for his beloved Floss that a "yellow sixpenny" could buy.

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It was really the same theme, you see, for this Carrots of the eighteen-nineties and my still more forlorn young Carrots of the nineteen-forties: accused of dishonesty or greed, not understanding what they had done, faithful sentinels to a literal idea that certain symbols were currency for the heart's wish and on these symbols they must somehow fix their unwavering eyes. But the rest was not so simple; money, as against what money could buy, was sadly muddled up in their minds. I think in all our minds.

In the sitting-room of our house in Holland Park, when I was a child, stood a box of “counters”. Children curiously take it for granted that what is in their own home must as a matter of course exist in every other; I never doubted but that every child's parents received the *Lady's Pictorial* and *Black and White* every week; and similarly I visualized every sitting-room all over England with an occasional table and on it a square box, reddish-brown, lacquered, gold-powdered, with the mysterious signature slanted across it also in gold: “Marquis”. I can no longer remember the chocolates which the box must have originally contained, though I expect they came from Paris and were brought in by a respectful admirer of my pretty Viennese mother; but the counters I remember clearly: smooth red, ivory white, as large as crown pieces, slippery and opulent; these, in our juvenile coinage, counted as “Tens”; a litter of smaller and quite trivial reds and whites, were merely “Ones”; and loveliest of all, a roulade of heavy golden coins—golden but not gold, though to me and no doubt to Carrots, indistinguishable from sovereigns (they still are, except for a few man-made values)—these, of course, served as “Twenties”. We were allowed to gamble madly with the counters in a card game called “Yellow Dwarf”, forbidden to me at last by authority because “little Gladys gets so feverish and excited” . . . I must have looked like Gaspard in “*Les Cloches de Corneville*”, or Henry Irving in “*The Bells*”. By every moral tale, this thwarted mania ought to have brought me to a bad end; suicide, say, in the gardens of Monte Carlo; though as it happens, I have never cared to gamble since entering my teens. And during all my peaceful seaside holidays at or near Monte Carlo during the ten years preceding this war, I only once entered the gaming-rooms, after a dinner to celebrate Somerset Maugham's birthday. I remained there reluctantly, and escaped as soon as he had won enough at chemin de fer to change these symbols into

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francs enough to buy himself a pair of coveted wooden dolphins for the patio of his Villa.

Currency "counters". To a sophisticated author they represented treasures of art; to Mrs. Molesworth's Carrots, a yellow sixpenny to buy Floss a new doll; to Carrots of Brambleford the end of a world war . . .

Nine for the Nine Bright Shiners,  
Eight for the Eight Bold Rangers,  
Seven for the Seven Stars in the Sky,  
Six for the Six Proud Walkers,  
Five for the Symbols at your door . . .

I am glad that still, in spite of all my questions, I understand as little of the actual meaning of this old marching song, as Carrots of half-sovereigns. To know exactly and encyclopaedically what were the Nine Bright Shiners, the Eight Bold Rangers, the Seven Stars in the Sky and the Six Proud Walkers, would be to rob them of their magic and the tantalizing sense that somehow each line holds an urgent personal message. *Who* were the Six Proud Walkers? How well "proud" becomes that line; pagan and splendid, marching in single file, the Six Proud Walkers . . . I do not know where they were walking, nor do I know if the Nine Bright Shiners were coins or stars. And again, is there any difference except what we choose to make of either? Currency of the earth or currency of the sky?

Which brings us neatly to Mr. E\*\*\*\* of Llandudno. In the same week as the most dramatic sensational events of the war in North Africa, that thrilling amber November of 1942, Mr. E\*\*\*\* of Llandudno, rightly preoccupied by his astronomical researches, discovered a far-off star no bigger than a minute. His discovery was corroborated by a telegram from a fellow-astronomer in Sweden—which may or may not have been exactly simultaneous. The event was recorded in every newspaper, though one paragraph was all that could be allowed for the announcement of this new Bright Shiner. Certainly the international astronomers searching the international heavens would care little for their "news value". Yet the rest of us should not be too star-aloof in war-time. The landing of American troops in North Africa must be the more important event, crowding every column of the newspapers, flinging us all out of stagnation's bog. The very song which tells us *Green Grow the Rushes-o*, song of the Twelve Apostles, the Ten Commandments, the Gospel Makers, the Lily-White Boys

clothed all in Green O, was revived in 1914 for the New Zealanders to go swinging along the roads of France, swinging into Passchendaele, stumbling back from Passchendaele—less than half of them.

"Five for the Symbols at your door." Childishly, which usually means literally, I saw myself going to the front door, opening it and seeing the symbols lying there on the mat. I do not know what they were, only that there were five. Hoping for the puzzle to be solved in words of one syllable, I consulted the dictionary and found, on the contrary, that "Symbol" was defined as: "Thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought." But then it goes on in a more sympathetic vein not so different from the Green Growing Rushes: "White, the lion, the thunderbolt, the cross, are symbols of purity, courage, Zeus, Christianity; values the handle to his name only as a symbol." I like "Values the handle to his name only as a symbol", for again I do not quite understand what it means, and there is no super-dictionary I can consult over the head, so to speak, of Dictionary Itself. Who is he, this mysterious Lord, caring so little for his lordship? The esoteric line has an esoteric rhythm: "Values the handle to his name only as a symbol" . . . in a world where all names are symbols, and behind them the curious legend of myth and fairy, pagan and Christian, which declares that names are the symbol of strength, and if you tell your name you lose strength and virtue will go out of you. The god Eros was aware of this when he sadly denied his name to Psyche; and Lohengrin, when he left his persistent bride on their very wedding-night, and started again in search of the Holy Grail; I feel that the Holy Grail comes into this somewhere; the Grail; the symbol; symbols are the "mathematical signs for addition and infinity". A shining chalice and a half-sovereign and a tiny new star might well have been three of the five symbols lying on the mat just outside my front door when I opened it; I cannot guess the other two, but as I was born under Gemini, it would be fun, if I opened the door quickly enough, to catch also the Lily-White Boys (clothed all in green) sitting on the mat, saying in unison: "We won't tell you our names"—for indeed we are never told, though some say it must surely be Castor and Pollux.

An unknown Sergeant-Pilot in the R.A.F. wrote me one day a letter full of enthusiasm about my family books, in which he seemed to find some peculiar satisfaction equivalent to "This one

and no other"—phrase expressing how my Rakonitz family ever fell in love with mysterious and sudden certainty. When on leave he came to see me; and I was amused and at the same time respectful of his integrity in this matter, when he not only rejected with some abruptness the works of most of my favourite writers, but also declared frankly that he had no interest in any of my books but these about the Matriarch and the Rakonitz tribe of several generations. A young man with no butter to spare. He told me it was his aunt who originally drew his attention to these chronicles of a family which fascinated her. Neither had any idea that it was partially a real family getting themselves mixed up with fiction in the way that families do, till in time the author cannot disentangle imagination from fact. The Matriarch herself, however, was not imaginary. She was my great-aunt; and I always thought of her rebelliously as a tyrant if ever there was one. Idly explaining these matters to the nephew of the Matriarch's fan, I asked him where *his* aunt lived? It was pleasant then to discover that she and the Matriarch had been neighbours during at least five or six years before the death of Anastasia, and that without knowing it she must have seen that domineering figure of fiction countless times going in and out of the house next door. "A sweet old lady", she may have thought, for the Matriarch's manner during her declining years was deceptive as brocade spread over a volcano.

You might have thought that that was enough coincidence. But a few weeks later, this new friend of mine in Bomber Command let fall by accident, and certainly without undue swagger, that his squadron had been in some of the big raids over Lübeck and Emden, and that it was an engaging habit of the R.A.F., when they had finished dropping their bombs, sometimes to send half a brick or an old boot hurtling after the deadlier missiles, with a personal message attached, such as: "Don't forget your affectionate cousin Bob" or "For Adolf, wishing him a happy birthday from Les."

"Next time you go," I asked wistfully, "do you think perhaps you could drop a broken bottle saying, 'With Love from Peter'?" I mean," I added hastily, anxious not to dislocate the whole course of the war; "I mean, if it's not going to hinder you from dropping real bombs."

Again weeks passed by, and I thought he had forgotten. Then he wrote to me: "Your love has been well and truly dropped over Germany, at a spot just outside Bremen a few nights ago.

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I wondered at the time whether the place has any associations for you. I couldn't somehow connect you with that part of the country . . .”

No, of course he could not. My ancestors on the Rakonitz side, the distaff side, the only ones he knew about, originally came up the Danube from Pressburg to Vienna and spread out from there to Paris and London. I was devoted to my father, but his family chronicles held absolutely no significance for me. I had never known my paternal grandparents nor any of their generation. He had come to live in England permanently when he was still a small boy, and unlike the Rakonitzes, he seemed to have forgotten the place where he kept his memory. So I only just knew, without any romantic interest, that my great-grandfather had been born near Bremen. Yet to an incurable pattern-monger like myself, it was inevitable that I should wonder for a moment at the strangeness of a great-great-grandmother holding a baby son in her arms, in the very place where far ahead in time, this baby's great-granddaughter would be given a chance to cock a symbolic snook at them down from the night sky.

Coincidences are still the funny little hieroglyphics of which we can make no sense, but which tantalize us nevertheless with the promise that some day they may be deciphered. As it happened, I had never heard of the famous Meissener Monkey Band in porcelain until, in 1938, an Irish girl staying with me triumphantly brought me a present of the monkey fiddler with a chip off his cocked hat. She had seen it in a junk-shop and thought I might like it to stand on my mantelpiece in Albany. I was delighted with it, and she courteously concealed the surprise she must have felt at my ignorance in not knowing that when fully assembled there were forty-four pieces or more to the complete orchestra. I valued my debonair monkey so much that he had a special little mourning ceremony in my mind when he disappeared with the rest of my things in that October air-raid of 1940. Living down in the country, I forgot his existence; but three years later, driving home to Albany again, past a treasure-shop off Piccadilly, I said to my companion in the taxi: “Look; they have several of the Meissener Monkey Band in that window. How I wish I could afford to buy one!” And because she was as ignorant as I had been when the fiddler was first given to me, I spattered her in rather a lordly way with all the connoisseur information I had then acquired on the subject.



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In the Rope-Walk, a few minutes later, I met Gabrielle, who, after a brief chat, remarked: "I saw Gail the other day and told her how frightfully sorry you were when that little ornament she gave you was lost in the fire." "That little ornament" was, you will easily have guessed, my monkey fiddler with the chipped hat, and I thought "How funny. Twice in the same half-hour!" I let myself into my pleasant ground-floor set of rooms, and settled down sternly to work. My new secretary put into my hands a jumble of rough notes, the collection of several years: "You haven't looked through these yet." The first which caught my eye (Honest Injun, 'Pon my sam, S'welp me, See this wet see this dry, and by all the pretty oaths that are not dangerous) was that jotting scribbled down when first Gail told me: "The M.M.O. consists of forty-four pieces, some 18th and some 17th century. 18th not so good." "That's the third time!" I exclaimed. And Dido, looking over my shoulder to see what I was talking about, contributed a fourth item to coincidence: "The Meissener Monkey Band? But I was reared on those ever since I was born," she said, exaggerating a little. "My mother's got about twelve counting the conductor. He's a lamb," getting her zoology mixed.

Ibsen went into voluntary exile from his own country in 1864 at the height of his success as a playwright. He was possessed of a burning sense of freedom for the individual and for the smaller nations. And when Bismarck annexed Schleswig-Holstein for the Prussians so that they might control the North Sea ports (presently ringeing the waves iron-grey by his name "The German Ocean") Ibsen felt passionately that Norway and Sweden should have gone to Denmark's help and protected that tiny country from assault. Nor could he live calmly any more in the midst of such indifference. A recently published life of Ibsen reveals this real motive for exile (a motive nobler and more credible than the idea hitherto believed, that he departed in pettish humour because Bjørnsen had been given a poet's pension, and not himself).

It also reveals, most strangely, where he went.

So strangely, indeed, that for a moment on first hearing it, the heart checks and will not accept it. He went to Rome, yes, that is well known. When not in Rome, he took sanctuary in the mountains, in a Bavarian village remote from the world, called Berchtesgaden. Here he must have tried to shake off thoughts of the great wrong done to Denmark's freedom. Here, perhaps, in the peaceful atmosphere which is bound to touch those who dwell

high among mountains without climbing them, he may have come to some rare mood of optimism; rare, that is, for Henrik Ibsen; saying to himself that one day there might be a stronger crusade for freedom, and Norway would help, and the Danes would recover their lost ports and harbours, and individual man do what splendid things he chose with his life . . . "Will the Herr Ausländer drink his lager then out here in the garden-freshness, or within?"

Ibsen at Berchtesgaden, at that time and for that reason, must surely count as more than coincidence: It is the perfect miracle of irony. At what borderline, then, does coincidence halt and miracle take its place? Coincidence, let us say, inspires two or more circumstances meeting each other with a slight shock in the same portion of space or time, when there seems no visible reason to our finite minds why they should do so. Of coincidence we may say, understating it: "This is funny!" But we should be incorrect to say "This isn't possible". For coincidence, however it may stagger us, does not need to tamper with the material and physical world in order to pull off even its most showy effects.

Nor are these miracles, that a box beside your bed can be made to repeat at a touch (or equally to stop repeating) what another box has recorded of what a man said two thousand miles away; nor that according to the different speed of travel between light and sound, it is a scientific fact that when the chimes of Big Ben are broadcast, a man can hear them in Australia before another man, without help of wireless, on Westminster Bridge.

A miracle happened when Elizabeth of Hungary was carrying bread and meat to the poor against her brutal husband's orders and he met her and asked her what was in her basket, and she replied "Roses, roses", and he roughly pulled aside the napkin and lo, there were roses.

It is impossible to do justice to this legend without use of the word "lo". Nor is this the moment to question whether "lo" could be the original of the modern "hello" and was once used as colloquially: Lo, there were roses! (Hello, there were roses!) In a short reminiscent tale by Neil Lyons, a woman in a shawl harassed the author by standing below his window every night in the wind and rain—or snow if she could get it!—bawling a ballad of picturesque sentiment and plain statement of which the refrain of each verse runs: "For lo! I am with child!" (Hello, I am with child!)

The reaction to a miracle is first amazement, as at a coincidence . . .

then it goes far beyond, creating awe and reverence, or terror and wild denial. There is no doubt, in spite of my protest just now, that Ibsen at Berchtesgaden could not in reality be put among the miracles, except in so far as such perfection of ironic planning ahead might entitle it to the tribute of a supernatural name. Certainly when I heard it I felt a touch of awe; a thousand other mountain villages he might equally have chosen for his exile and to contemplate freedom for the smaller nations. Still, it *was* possible to choose Berchtesgaden, so at that we must leave it. Coincidence will never give us a more finished performance.

From Yank's Cairo Bureau a newspaper cutting was sent by a friend to a friend, and gaily flipped at me by another friend; this seems to be the place to quote a slightly censored version: "It seems a Tommy lost his bayonet through carelessness and decided to cover the loss by replacing the weapon with one cleverly carved from wood. Things went very well until his company was ordered to fix bayonets. Fearful of baring his wooden substitute, he decided to leave his bayonet sheathed and frantically thought up an answer for the sergeant-major who immediately demanded an explanation. Said he: 'My good father, on his deathbed several years ago, pledged me not to bare a bayonet on that date henceforth . . . To-day is that date and I honour his dying wish.' The sergeant-major said the story sounded weak and exceedingly fishy, and ordered him to bare his bayonet. Seeing that the jig was up, the Tommy, as he grasped for the handle, muttered in a solemn voice: 'May the bloody thing be turned to wood!'"

I expect the sergeant-major thereafter became a deeply religious man. Or he may have merely observed: "Well, that's funny!" not appreciating the delicate nuance of miracle over humorous coincidence.

"Allergic" is a word that because of its convenience, has become fashionable, and because of its fashion has become tiresome and inaccurately placed. To be allergic means, as far as I can tell without looking it up, to be responsive to one's detriment. Allergic to strawberries means a rash, allergic to shellfish means another rash, and allergic to cats means asthma; so that when I say I am allergic to rainbows, let it be clearly understood that this is a misuse of the word. Nevertheless, leaving out the physical aspect, I am instantly responsive to a rainbow in the sky and responsive to my detriment, for I superstitiously believe that it is set there in token of a covenant—not that there shall be no more rain, for rain refreshes the earth;

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and not as was originally promised that “the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh”, for floods are rare and we do not dwell in fear of them. Yet I cannot help my trust in visible signs and tokens, by which every rainbow is to me a breathless miracle to recall in hours of grey despondency: “And God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.”

Five for the symbols at your door . . . If you have a nature, as I have, where the world darkens quickly and life itself becomes too leaden to lift, then you have need of the symbols, of the exultant rainbow. Then perhaps it is good, not bad, that you should respond to the shown reminder of a personal covenant between earth and heaven; for we are still children enough at the word “heaven” to give an involuntary glance upward at the sky, before we remember that heaven need not literally be up there, but anywhere, and especially past—“the low lintel of the human heart”.

It was during the fourth year of the war, and when I had not seen the sea for nearly four years (because to non-combatants this had to be an inland war) that after a severe illness I was sent early in February to Tor Cross, a few miles along the coast from Dartmouth.

Convalescence, as we all know, has not in real life that touching literary quality of lying gentle and grateful on the sofa, saying “Thank you” to everything and everybody, and “I’ll be better soon”, and feeling how beautiful is the return to life from the shores of death. On the contrary, when you are convalescent, you are discontented, afraid, restless, weak, fretful and utterly pessimistic. Nothing is worth while, nothing will ever be worth while, then why get better?— Anyhow, you are *not* getting better, and it is foolish and exasperating for everyone to keep on reiterating that you are, for what do they know about it? *That* is convalescence. And that was my delicious state of mind and soul and body when I arrived at Tor Cross; though the first evening I was happy enough, triumphant at a difficult journey accomplished and at the discovery that they had not cheated me and here in wide reality was the sea again, crashing and

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sucking back the little stones after every wave, directly under my window.

People that build their houses inland,  
People that buy a plot of ground  
Shaped like a house, and build a house there,  
Far from the sea-board, far from the sound

Of water sucking the hollow ledges,  
Tons of water striking the shore,—  
What do they long for, as I long for  
One salt smell of the sea once more :

But the next day, triumph had ebbed away. The weather was drab and humid, and the sea lay flat as a tin tray and as colourless. I had nothing else to do but get better and try to behave like Little Nell, Little Paul, Little Eva and Locke's little Stella Maris (not the Locke who wrote on the Human Understanding); so I wanted Old Salts to watch, and nets with their cork floats spread on the steep cobbles, and brilliant sails, and a haul of fresh mackerel every few hours. I had forgotten, of course, that this was war-time; sans Salts, sans fish, sans nets, sans sails, sans everything. Suffering from the reaction of my move out of London, and not nearly as close to recovery as I had hoped (that damned streptococcus) I lay and looked at the few dreary gulls flapping about, and thought about the drug loosely called M. and B. and its after-effects, which is no subject for poetic reflection though it had saved my life, undeniably, four times in three years. Humiliating to have one's life saved by M. and B.; the same sort of undeserved humiliation as when in the old days, the very old days, one tried to sell one's clothes, one's very old clothes, and be able to buy new ones. A ceremony which has now acquired the charm of unbelievable quaintness, like the "Cries of Old London"—

THE DEALER (*suspiciously*): Bit dark in here, isn't it?

ONESELF (*feebly*): Is it? I hadn't noticed it, my eyes . . . Of course, these winter mornings . . .

DEALER (*used to this*): Might be better if you drew back them curtains.

ONESELF (*in an unconvincing voice*): Oh of course, yes, they are drawn, aren't they? There, that's better, isn't it?

DEALER (*after grim examination, picking up garments one by one, scrutinizing them, holding them up to the light, putting them down again without a word, ignoring one's bright running chatter, at last abruptly*): Hole here! (*triumphantly poking her thumb through from behind*). And another one here. Moth (*throws it down again*).

"FIVE FOR THE SYMBOLS AT YOUR DOOR"

ONESSELF: Oh, I don't think so. We haven't any moths, at least we never *have* had.

DEALER (*after a further twenty minutes*): This the lot:

ONESSELF: I think so (*as though one didn't know*).

DEALER: No demand for any of this stuff. If it had been gentlemen's tweeds—Your husband hasn't got no tweeds he'd like to sell me, I suppose?

But to answer this in full would involve a complete life history: Not only why your husband hasn't got no tweeds and why he wouldn't sell them if he had, but why you haven't got a husband. Finally one said "No" as involving least trouble.

Haggling ends abruptly, and one is left without dignity or self-respect, but clutching a filthy piece of paper representing, they say, ten shillings, and a further dingy florin and four greasy pennies. Which is exactly how one feels after the miracle of Sulphanilamide, and exactly how I felt the whole grey humid length of my first day at Tor Cross. Not even stormy rain; what word is drearier than drizzle?

"There's nothing to look forward to," I moaned, ungrateful that I was still a living creature. "Nothing anywhere."

And the answer to that nonsense was a rainbow. Not slowly appearing and only faintly visible at first, but a rainbow brilliant and sudden as the first covenant, arching right across the sky till the end of it touched the waters and the other end the low green hills. The blurring rain had vanished as though a Word had been spoken to dissolve it, and in the sudden riot of blue sky and colour, sun on the sea and sun on the hills, the rainbow still swept in a strong curve. For once, there was not that impermanent gone-in-a-moment feeling of rainbows, but as though it might be there for ever, and you could have confidence and gaze and gaze and even look away for a few moments and it would still be there. It had a two-dimensional reality, perhaps because you could see the whole span at once, not chopped into broken segments by chimney-pot or roof. And as though that were not enough, a second rainbow appeared within the first, gaily repeating the promise. Only after a long time—as one measures time in rainbows—did the brightness gradually recede, back and back across the bay to the hills, fainter, fading, gone.

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I did not know then that we were in for a positive hysteria of rainbows; that we were to see them every day and every few

minutes, and that the exclamation "Look ! (or lo !) there's another !" was to become so frequent that at last it produced merely laughter instead of solemn exultation. I have never seen so many rainbows and I simply cannot imagine why heaven should have been tossing out its bales of surplus stock over this one bay on the Devon coast.

But the first is always different; and I felt strong enough, after I had seen it, to walk up the lane over the cliff and a little way inland towards the soft slopes of green grass and red soil. Here was a new heaven and a new earth; a brook tinkled down the hill beside the road, a February brook, yet tiny white strawberry blossoms were mixed up with the tangle of moss and fern and cresses at the edge, and violets and last year's weeds. The branches overhead were slim and dark silver and bare, so that you did not have to seek among the foliage for the bird jubilantly trilling its rainbow notes. I leant over the low damp-smelling stone wall to rest and listen, and looked down on the Ley, as they call it there, the inland lake on the other side of the sea-road across Slapton Sands. The swans floated about in couples like beautiful white platitudes, and low above the vivid straw-yellow of the reeds, the marsh-fowl flew and quacked, dived and brushed the surface and fussed among the rushes. The evening sea was now subdued to the murmur of a silken fan; I seemed to hear it spreading and closing in broken rhythm all along the broken edge of England; that edge which is so much more strangely moving now, than its safer inland meadow and Down and valley. I was tired, but I wished to see what further loveliness was round the bend of the lane before I turned to go back.

And there, sudden as a blow, hard and grim and uncompromising in the middle of the gentle upward curve, lay an old dry skull with horns, the horns of a ram.

Five for the Symbols at your Door.

That rainbow was too brilliant; it had needed correction. And the skull alone would have been untrue to life.

This was an amazing day.

The common or party conjurer would come nearest of all men to working miracles if only he did not know himself how he worked them. But we learn as we grow older that he does know, and that is why they are called conjuring tricks and not miracles. "Tricks" ought to have given it away from the start, but we met the conjurer while we were still credulous children, happy in our

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awe and credulity as the girl in Chesterton's play "Magic", who went solitary in the wood and met the wizard and kept on asking his name, though he, true to the laws of fable, would tell her nothing except:

I have a hat, but not to wear.  
I have a sword, but not to slay.  
And ever in my bag I bear  
A pack of cards, but not to play.

But he could do no more than his conventional parlour tricks until in pride and wounded vanity he called up the aid of black magic. Yet no sensational alliance between conjurer and Satan could ever softly flower into what we call a miracle . . . They cannot do roses and they cannot do rainbows.

I found myself rushing headlong towards the soprano assertion that only God can make a tree.

## CHAPTER VI

### “ONE IS ONE AND ALL ALONE”

ONE is One and all alone and ever more shall be so. Or, spelling it less solemnly without capital letters, one is oneself and all alone—

At times that knowledge of oneself is as exultant as the miracle of the rainbow in a great arch over sea and land; sometimes as frightening as the ram's skull across the path, shrivelled and at odds with the living world.

In the first and more sober mood, you are not only convinced of the promise of God: "I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh"—but of oneself as God's living creature, creative. I remember a famous painter remarking as we strolled through Brambleford on an evening of early September and noticed the pure sky over the Downs after a day of storm: "I've run out of the colour I use to make that sky!" He has probably never in his life said anything so innocent and omnipotent; he has danced with rage whenever reminded that he said it. I would rather have been a painter, by which I naturally mean a good painter, than anything



else in the whole world. Rather than write prose or poetry; rather than compose music; rather than act; rather than win races, or lead nations by oratory; rather than excel in any of these, do I wish to have been able to state with perfect conviction: "I've run out of the colour I use to make that sky!" (William, no doubt, would say that it would have been even better *not* to have run out of the colour he uses to make that sky! But the war draws away equipment from the oddest places, and puts most of it to the saddest uses.)

I would have chosen to paint because I believe that a painter can swing himself free of unhappiness by his own medium, while he is actually at work. It means absorbing ourselves in colour and colours, something we can do with our hands as well as with mind and spirit; and that leaves hardly a chink for trouble to edge in and upset the fun. You need not shut yourself up indoors to paint; your fortress or your sanctuary, whichever you like to call it, is carried along with you and set up by this intense preoccupation . . . One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so.

Painting ensures that kingdom of well-being in oneself (I am guessing, for I am no painter) which cannot be achieved by writing (I am not guessing, for I am a writer). "My mind to me a kingdom is"—but most damnably it is not, and nevermore shall be so. People fail to realize how much the physical equipment in creation must count; there is precious little pleasure in even the most skilfully sharpened pencils, the most smoothly running fountain-pen or the purest sheets of thick white delicately-ruled foolscap. It matters how you write, but (literally) not in the least how you write it. Shakespeare himself might have had the handwriting of an illiterate schoolboy; the handiwork is nothing and you cannot get restlessness out of you that way, nor the perpetual desire for goodness knows what. But a painter has every satisfaction fulfilled and all at the same time. Yes, I should indeed like to have been born a painter.

Hardly any children write just for fun and whether they have a gift for writing or not. Hardly any children compose music for fun; when they want to make a row, they shout, blow trumpets, beat drums; musical composition means endless lessons and hard work. But children paint for fun; they mime for fun; they dance for fun, and they talk for fun. If I could not have been a great painter, the next wishes on my list would be for acting and ballet, both companionable arts, break-

ing down loneliness and that feeling we all have at moments, sometimes for weeks and years and all our lives, that we really belong to a Waifage and nobody has found us because nobody is even looking for us.

That Waifage feeling must have been what Grimaldi had when he was suffering from melancholia and the great specialist told him to go and see Grimaldi and have a good laugh. Carrots was eligible for nomination to the Waifage in that terrible hour of loneliness when they did not understand about the half-sovereign; and the little evacuee in Berkshire when they chased him with stinging-nettles. There was a terrific vogue for Waifage during the latter years of Queen Victoria's reign. Born in 1890, I came slap into it, and shades of the Waifage began to close about the growing girl. Many of the books of my childhood concerned themselves lacrimoniously with the pathos of the Waif on the doorstep, no Christmas tree, a little brother to keep in crutches, and both arms round the neck of a dear, dear doggie of uncertain breed (himself a candidate for a dogs' Waifage). Any story about rich children had to show them misunderstood to the verge of imbecility and suicide, to counterbalance the small amenities of butler and carpets, roast chicken and velvet suits.

I started writing plays and acting in them when I was about seven, and nearly all my plays contained a waif somewhere, except the first: four acts and fourteen scenes with the moral title: "The Prince who Preferred Modesty to Beauty". I believe I was about twelve when I wrote a poem by which I could reduce myself to heartbroken tears at any moment; it was called "Nobody-Loves-Me". I expect it was autobiographical, though I put myself into trousers and included the birth of a fictitious baby brother who ousted me from my parents' affections:

—For there in the cradle a baby lay,  
Everyone crowding to pet him;  
Nobody-loves-me crept away,  
Somehow they seemed to forget him.

Even the theatre proper, at this period, offered a crop of one-act plays all in the Waifage tradition of pathos. I was taken as a regular treat to the Coronet Theatre at Notting Hill Gate, and saw the lot: "The Convict on the Hearth", "Hop o' My Thumb", "A Bit of Old Chelsea"—one-act plays where the leading rôle was invariably named Saucers or Tatters or Rags, showing us what

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we might expect. I remember how impressed I was by an enormous poster outside the Coronet, of "Two Little Vagabonds", a pair with enormous eyes, curly hair, knees and elbows conscientiously pushed through their clothing, clinging together against the world, behind a broken-down caravan in a storm; sprawling right across the poster was a verse which reminded me in a most gratifying way of my own style of poetry at that period.

Two little Vagabonds, lost and astray,  
Flowers that blossom by life's stony way,  
Lift up your heads to the wonderland blue,  
In the distance is waiting God's sunshine for you.

Many years later, when a play of mine was being rehearsed at the St. Martin's with Miss Hilda Trevelyan, I made the ecstatic discovery that she had been one of the original little Vagabonds (flowers that blossom by life's stony way) crouching on the poster outside the Coronet. Of course Barrie could write Waifery plays till all was wonderland blue; so could Charlie Chaplin in slightly different idiom. However we may scoff, the vogue can never quite die out. And if it had seemed moribund during the era when Evelyn Waugh summed up for our irony and pity the Nothing-Sacred set miscalled the Bright Young Things, it has now been brought back with a vengeance (though the vengeance is yet to come) during a war which has made nearly the whole world into one vast Waifery in search of refuge; homeless and hunted with stinging-nettles.

I seem to remember writing two one-act Waifery plays in my teens, plaintive trifles which must have been a great relief to my overcharged heart. The heroine of one was a lonely understudy in a fifth-rate touring company, the butt of the troupe, who worshipped the leading man and suddenly got her chance, because the leading lady was missing, to play her part—"for one night only" (title of play)—Only to discover at the last moment that the leading man had eloped with the leading lady and that *his* part was also being played by an understudy. It is perhaps needless for me to say that the curtain came down on the lonely little dressing-room Waif staring straight in front of her into a Dostoevsky future, while her comrades silently made a tiptoe exit. Recalling it now in the light of some thirty-five years' experience as a writer, it still strikes me as not at all a bad plot; but

my approach was wrong; I thought then I had got hold of a Little Slice of Tragedy.

I cannot remember the title of my other opus on the Waifage theme, though I do remember that it was commissioned to star a dancer who could not act; it went on tour and I am still owed £5 on it. The heroine was called Fanchette; she was one of those little-dancers-on-the-streets-during-the-French-Revolution waifs, and I can best describe it in the words of that amateur playwright whom we all know too well (though *her* play is eternally about Marie Antoinette): "Well, the curtain goes up, you see, and they're all in an inn, you know, a French inn, you know, somewhere near the coast, and a lot of them are sitting round a table plotting, and a man keeps on coming in called François, but he's not *in* the plot so they all stop . . ."

In my one-act play was a young aristo condemned to die ("Vive la Guillotine!") and Fanchette loved him, though of course he had never noticed her because he loved the Comtesse de something, and there was a Pardon and they were afraid it wouldn't come in time (funny about those Ethelred-the-Unready pardons!) and Fanchette had to dance before the Governor—and all round him—until it did come, even if it was ever so! She danced and danced and *danced* (atragirl!) and the Governor's eyes were simply bulging till at last the property coconut-shells brought the Pardon (thundering hooves off-stage, and foam-flecked flanks, also off-stage) and poor little Fanchette sank exhausted to the ground, fainting or dying, I forget which. She had served him, she was forgotten, nobody cared . . .

Can I have been taken to see "The Only Way"? You bet. Four times; my favourite play; until at sixteen I was strongly influenced by the Ibsen-Yeats-Maeterlinck School of fantasy, to write a drama in three acts: "Maid o' the Moors". This time my heroine was one of the not-quite-a-mortal-not-quite-a-fairy kind, who has to follow when she hears certain tunes coming nearer and nearer over the hills, and during thunderstorms is furthermore compelled to jettison her shoes and stockings and outer petticoat, and dance wildly in the dawn and in the moonlight and in the long grass, until her weird fate is fulfilled . . . I could not know how faithfully I was anticipating "Mary Rose", only placing it on the rocky shores of Cornwall instead of the rocky Hebrides. And instead of the young Naval Officer, forthright and honest, I produced a Cornish fishing-lad, Rollo, equally forthright and honest

and naturally utterly bewildered at all this Fey and Minstrelsy and vanishing brides and long dark hair wind-swept. The final curtain, as again you may have guessed, left Rollo standing alone upon the stage staring disconsolately at a pair of stockings and a pair of shoes lightly tossed away in a circle of moonlight, while a chorus of invisible elves taunted him mockingly on his failure to keep the girl at home (How're you goin' to keep her down on the farm after she's seen Patee?) . . . and from over the hills, getting fainter and fainter, we hear the Minstrel's music drawing the Maid o' the Moors to the Back o' Beyond.

Modern idiom has still produced no better word than the old-fashioned "Stage-struck" to describe why I looked on my subsequent novelist career as no better than marking time. If I could not be an actress—and the Academy of Dramatic Art in Gower Street had assured me of this without, as they say, mincing matters—then I would at least be a dramatist. I believe this desire can quite simply be analysed as my Gemini rebellion against doing anything alone (I have never understood how Ruth Draper can possibly enjoy rehearsals). But I was thirty-nine before I had a play put on properly, by which I mean in a London West-End theatre with a West-End cast, and even then it was not primarily written as a play but as a dramatization of my novel "The Matriarch". I have already described in an earlier volume the thrilling experience of having Mrs. Patrick Campbell as one's first leading lady.

I very nearly had the joy and honour of another Matriarch, as great in her own language as Mrs. Pat in English: Madame Yvette Guilbert. She saw the play and hankered to appear as Anastasia Rakonitz in Paris; but finally had to give up the idea, regretfully admitting that her memory, since a recent illness, would not allow her to play such a long part . . . (Mrs. Patrick Campbell never let *that* worry her!). It was, however, while the idea was still under discussion and I was staying in Paris with my "management", Frank and Virginia Vernon (the latter an adopted daughter of Madame Guilbert) that that wonderful actress staged a little scene of family reunion which gave her infinite pleasure. I had happened to mention that the well-known French writer Henri Duvernois was a close relation of mine, a member of the Rakonitz family and a first cousin of the original Matriarch, though he and I had never met and he probably was not aware of my existence. Yvette Guilbert was delighted, for he was a great friend of hers. To such an actress a normal introduction: "M. Duvernois, Mlle Stern"

was not to be contemplated. She composed a small and intimate lunch-party; her husband Max, Frank and Virginia and myself were well primed in our parts, and the unconscious leading man placed on my left, where he entertained me excellently with his genial anecdotes. In the midst of one of these, he was suddenly interrupted by his hostess: "*Tiens!*" cried Yvette Guilbert as if she had just made a remarkable discovery, and again: "*Tiens!*" staring at us transfixed. Everyone stopped talking and there was a great deal of "*mais quoi donc*" and so forth. "It occurs to me," exclaimed Yvette Guilbert, agitated, "that there is between those two," indicating Henri and myself, "a resemblance of the most extraordinary." The others rattled in on cue: "Indeed yes! But regard! Of everything of the *most* extraordinary!" . . . Henri naturally swung round in his seat and took a good look at me; I do not know if he was pleased; I hope I was looking my best. Anyhow, now came my pre-arranged speech. Casting down my eyes demurely: "I cannot flatter myself that I at all resemble monsieur, but it is certain that he does most closely resemble the portrait of our mutual great-grandfather." "What!" cried Henri. "Who so?" "Simon Rakonitz," I replied. "Mais!" cried Henri (*né* Rakonitz), opening his arms wide for me to fall into them. "Bonjour, ma cousine!" Everybody cheered wildly, and happy was Yvette Guilbert while he enquired enthusiastically after the health and fortune of every one of our relations in London, especially of Anastasia Rakonitz the Matriarch, and we toasted her again and again in glorious French wine. Very like a scene in musical comedy.

The curious thing which I could not have anticipated when we all arranged this encounter beforehand, was that Henri Duvernois really *did* look exactly like the portrait of Simon Rakonitz which hung on one side of the fireplace in the Matriarch's house; Babette Rakonitz on the other. It was their story which had impelled me to write the family chronicles which had led to the production of my first play—and to my passionate wish to have another play put on as quickly as possible in spite of all the well-known agonies that go with it. *We are all in the same boat* is a compensation for anything: air-raid, fear of invasion, earthquake, even income-tax. If you write a play and have it produced and the first night is clearly a flop (or at least, not clearly but always confusedly), you can still make a joke of it with the whole company and stage staff, curse someone or something outside the Royal Enclosure, and put on your gay bravado act next day at lunch at the Ivy. But when

you have written a book and it is a flop, your sentence arrives by instalments and you take it solitary.

When I was a schoolgirl between twelve and fourteen, disillusioned by an unsuccessful home production of Charles II (I wasn't too hot as Charles, but Nell Gwyn was worse; she should have stuck to maths.), I had a brief and utterly different phase of wanting to go into Parliament. My signature tune was "tariff reform!" and my leader Joe Chamberlain with his orchid and lean querulous face. I can remember a school debate where, as they say, I carried all before me; what I cannot understand is why my opponent seemed to be putting up Lord Byron as a rival: Memory must have got the slides mixed and one debate superimposed on another. I often wonder why I never followed up this career: In many ways it might have suited me better than what I have chosen. "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party"—That, after all, contains in one swinging slogan the invitation that has never failed to stimulate my spirit and reassure my soul, in direct contrast to the Waifage panic: being left out, not asked to join, nobody-loves-me, a superfluous one is one and all alone. Yet when I was in Hollywood writing films in 1933, I was stunned and incredulous when Captain Reginald Berkeley suddenly said to me, on hearing a few of my views on this and that: "Then may I tell Herbert Samuel that you're willing to stand in the Liberal Interest at the next by-election?" I stared at him, wondering if he could possibly be serious, and if even for one moment in his mind I could be connected so definitely and actively with that remote place called Parliament: The very jargon he used: "By-election", "In the Liberal Interest . . ." yes, I suppose I was a Liberal; my father had been, I know; and Joe Chamberlain; and the only political leader in whose house I had ever stayed, that spell-binder of Bron-y-de, David Lloyd George. *Why* did I never at least set out on the road that led to Westminster? I had the equipment, a brain good enough to have earned my living by its exercise and be keenly aware sometimes (not always) of an almost physical pleasure in its functioning power. Added to this, I was and am the sort of speaker who can usually get the mood of an audience, whoever they are, and make them listen, make them laugh, make them like me. This, please, is honesty, not conceit; I am as sure of my capacity here as I am sure of my incapacity to run any domestic and mechanical affairs without clumsiness, hesitation and bad results,

however often I am shown and however sincerely I try (the sight of a gadget even as simple as a corkscrew or a tin-opener is enough to make me burst into tears). So the fact that I never actively interested myself in politics, nor understood their dry hard words and ill-chosen idiom, emphatically does not mean in my case what it meant with so many Little Ladies of the Victorian and Edwardian type; that they were too wrapt up in personal pleasures, clothes, flippancies and flirtations.

I have, on the contrary, an urge which has increased and not lessened with time and age, an urge to talk to people and make them talk to me; or rather, talk to them so that they *should* talk to me. I want to be told sooner than tell; I want their home life, their views, their amusements, how they feel about Mum, how they shake off depression—I want it all. Not simply out of curiosity; curiosity is the start of it, but I have a queer sense that I can use this knowledge valuably, and not merely professionally as a writer of fiction "interested" in the Common Man; for I cannot help doubting if the Common Man, a convenient abstraction in political jargon, does in fact exist at all. Herd instinct does exist, when each *uncommon* man is swept by a common reaction. But the common man, once aware of himself as such, would immediately become the self-conscious man, rightly suspecting patronage from the self-styled Uncommon Man higher up in development and originality, offering to state their case for them; offering in the same tone as the S.P.C.A. legend we used to read in omnibuses: "We speak for those who cannot speak for themselves"—Yet there is no reason whatever to suppose that the Common Man, even if he exists, must necessarily be inarticulate.

So it had never occurred to me that in England, and even more in America during recent years, there was a question growing angrier every day, called the "Proletarian Novel Controversy"—until suddenly, at a Woman's Club dinner-party after my lecture in one of the Twin Cities of Minnesota, a neighbour fired at my head: "What are your views, Miss Stern, on this question of the Proletarian Novel?" If she had said "What are your views on the Proletariat?", leaving out "novel", I should have recognized at least that I was in the presence of an important subject; a formidable subject; and would have replied in humility that I knew very little about politics and certainly not enough to express myself in views. But "Proletarian Novel" in inverted commas as she used it, surely that must be a contradiction in terms? A novel is a story about



individual human beings, what they feel and what they do. I certainly do try to avoid a setting where rank and title, sport and diplomacy predominate, and equally, a setting of slums or of miners or factory strikes; not, God forbid, from snobbery which is practically a certifiable flaw in anybody, up and down and inside-out, but because, though the psychology of men and women in these settings and occupations probably does not differ, it would involve too much mugging-up of actual facts in order to avoid such deathless inaccuracies as Ouida and her "all rowed fast but none so fast as Stroke".

Six years later, half in 1938 and half in 1939, I wrote a novel called "A Lion in the Garden". I was so intensely absorbed in my hero, a thoughtful little odd-job man, that I did not change my theme half-way through, when war crashed into England (and incidentally, a major operation into my own personal life), but struggled on to finish it honestly according to my original conception; and so earned myself the condemnation of an American reviewer-lady—the only exception in a brilliant, kind and discriminating group—which I am never likely to forget, for I read her censure in the summer of 1940, just after Dunkirk, when we woke up every morning (if we slept at all) accepting the fact that the day might well bring invasion and "tout est perdu fors l'honneur". But the reviewer-lady could not believe, she moaned, that an English woman in war-time could *bear* to write a novel about *any* subject unconnected with the war; so trivial that apparently it hurt her to read it: "like being whipped with feathers". This book, she continued, wagging her head reproachfully, could not represent the Spirit of British Womanhood. I might perhaps have more pictorially represented that noble figurehead on the eve of destruction, had I not just become aware that I should have a second and even more dangerous operation, and was wondering whether it were worth while, considering one thing and another, to bother about my own body at all, when London and its hospitals were threatened with destruction at any moment by a thousand bombers overhead. Still and even in that hour, an integral respect for one's profession curiously survives, so that I could have read and accepted without bitterness any critical slashing of my book itself, interested to hear a clear and adequate analysis of where I had failed. But at that hour to have my private and personal soul attacked, and its failure in patriotism, remains the one unpardonable thing that has ever been done to me. For what could she want in the way of suitable

and worthy behaviour? Instantly when war broke out, to halt half-way in the middle of a sentence, declaring that now I could and would write of nothing but the war? Or to stop writing altogether? Yes, if I had had the health to do a more vital job.

The lady-reviewer could not know these facts. She *could* know that always and everywhere are facts we do not know.

Setting aside the Spirit of British Womanhood whom I so lamentably failed to "represent", "A Lion in the Garden" represented my first unconscious attempt at a Proletarian Novel. At the time of the dinner in Minnesota, my neighbour and I were, in fact, misunderstanding one another in the old way of an incompatible word-currency. Even had I by more satisfactory timing, already written that book, I should have been like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain who had spoken prose all his life without realizing it was prose. I took "Proletarian" to mean Political, not applying it to the individual man and woman with whom I talked every day of my life, adding salt to my bread, or bread to my salt according to how it happened. So I replied with sincere humility for my ignorance that I had no views on the question of the Proletarian Novel. And let it go at that.

Three weeks later, I was sent a leading article containing a violent attack on me for this remark, by a journalist on a St. Paul newspaper. The fury of his onslaught on my reported indifference and flippancy so bewildered me that I could hardly be angry; for indeed I did not know what I had done to deserve it. I had *not* been indifferent or flippant in St. Paul; I was a serious-minded woman, at all times respectful to universal burning questions of the century. The whole thing must be some strange mistake.

In the early spring I returned to New York while Macmillan's launched my new book: "Monogram". They rang up and asked me if I would give half an hour to a lonely young writer staying in my hotel? Yes, of course I could see the young man from the Waiforage. My publisher warned me that I would find him terribly shy.

James Gray duly rang me up; his voice was charming, though so diffident that he could hardly talk at all. I tried to encourage him without sounding too much of the genial lady-patroness. We met downstairs at the Gotham bar; he was dark and grave and very good-looking, and I especially liked his manners; but it took a great deal of preliminary massage before he would talk about himself and his work, of which, unlike Mr. George Bernard

Shaw, he genuinely seemed to have the poorest opinion. I asked him what was his home town? He replied "St. Paul". I remarked lightly that I had an unknown enemy in St. Paul—

—Naturally you will have guessed the end of the story. It was, as they say, written in his face. He owned up. After a pause of agony, we both laughed . . . and laughed so much and talked so much and ordered so many cocktails that a friendship was formed which I hope still endures. (He reviewed "Monogram" at great length for the St. Paul newspaper; reviewed it honestly, I am sure, for he had an honest mind; but it happened that he really liked it. The bundle from the press-cutting agency followed me to England, and I read it back in my own home, read on to the end without quite realizing that the last paragraph was not still part of the review: "*Is there time for just one more cocktail at the Gotham bar before you leave? No? Well then, goodbye.*")

My neighbour at the Woman's Club dinner had, it transpired during that first conversation, mis-reported not only my words but my attitude. So delighted was she at having, as she thought, found an ally against the Proletarian Novel, aware that James Gray was its passionate partisan, that she informed him kindly how G. B. Stern had, so to speak, kicked it in the belly and danced away, rippling with mirth.

"Tell me quietly and slowly," I asked him—(yes, thanks, one more cocktail)—"What is the Proletarian Novel Controversy?"

He defined it for my ignorance as briefly as possible: Apparently it rested on the premise that *no* novel of the present time could be of any value whatsoever unless it represented the proletariat point of view, and fought constructively on behalf of their rights and ideologies.

. . . The whole kingdom of story-book fell in shards round my feet.

Yet now that I knew, of course I could recall reading Proletarian Novels by the dozen and by the hundred; many of them naturally as fine, as exciting, as passionate, as witty in character and romantic in motive as other fine novels; and some of them, naturally again, as bad as the worst. In each case I had paid the author the innocent tribute of not recognizing it by that truculent description, and letting them take pot-luck as far as I, the reader, was concerned. By a masterpiece of ironic humour, it did not even occur to me till much later that far from destroying the kingdom of story-book, my favourite story was by all the laws and definitions a Proletarian

Novel; one of the finest ever written: “The History of Mr. Polly”, by H. G. Wells. True and enduring except for certain subsequent reforms which it may easily have helped to bring about.

“Perhaps after all it was not simple indigestion that troubled him. Behind the superficialities of Mr. Polly’s being, moved a larger and vaguer distress. The elementary education he had acquired had left him with the impression that arithmetic was a fluky science and best avoided in practical affairs, but even the absence of book-keeping, and a total inability to distinguish between capital and interest, could not blind him for ever to the fact that the little shop in the High Street was not paying. . . .

“There had been a time when two people had thought Mr. Polly the most wonderful and adorable thing in the world . . . had worshipped him from the crown of his head to the soles of his exquisite feet. And also they had fed him rather unwisely, for no one had ever troubled to teach his mother anything about the mysteries of a child’s upbringing—though, of course, the monthly nurse and her charwoman gave some valuable hints—and by his fifth birthday the perfect rhythms of his nice new interior were already darkened with perplexity. . . .

“Mr. Polly went to the National School at six, and he left the private school at fourteen, and by that time his mind was in much the same state that you would be in, dear reader, if you were operated upon for appendicitis by a well-meaning, boldly enterprising, but rather overworked and underpaid butcher boy, who was superseded towards the climax of the operation by a left-handed clerk of high principles but intemperate habits—that is to say, it was in a thorough mess. The nice little curiosities and willingness of a child were in a jumbled and thwarted condition, hacked and cut about—the operators had left, so to speak, all their sponges and ligatures in the mangled confusion—and Mr. Polly had lost much of his natural confidence, so far as figures and sciences and languages and the possibilities of learning things were concerned. He thought of the present world no longer as a wonderland of experiences, but as geography and history, as the repeating of names that were hard to pronounce, and lists of products and populations and heights and lengths, and as lists and dates—oh! and Boredom indescribable. . . .”

I hope that never again will I confuse the Proletarian Novel, to which, as I now perceive, Dickens, Gissing and Charles Reade also made notable contributions, with the political novel familiar to me by Disraeli, Mallock, the Duke of Omnium half-dozen in Trollope's Barchester Series, and Mrs. Humphry Ward's "Marriage of William Ashe"—which I had read when I was ten.

I still maintain that had I adventured into an active political world, I would have ceased writing; and I am still puzzled as to why I chose one career and dismissed the other. But I must have been born lacking the elementary response to politics, as some are born lacking an ear for music; they may be conscientiously aware of this lacuna, learn and practise and play a set piece or two; but directly they stop, it will be seen that all their persistent toil was in vain and nothing has adhered of its own accord. That I have never been politically minded has something to do with my upbringing; for schoolgirls did not then, as during the last fifteen or twenty years, learn about current events, discussing them with the atlas in front of them, encouraged to read the *New Statesman* and leaders in *The Times*; yet many of my contemporaries have since revealed an inner compulsion towards politics, connecting themselves with Suffrage and Rights for Women, Local Government, Housing and Child-welfare, all the authorized roads to Westminster. I was certainly, as the grown-ups roguishly termed it, a regular little bookworm, but my reading (let me own it, for the confession may be salutary) has been undisciplined and unconcentrated. I read voraciously for pleasure, as one eats strawberries and cream for pleasure; but neither in my own home nor at school did I ever learn to read, once I had mastered that the cat sat on the mat: it is a good cat (problematic). Afterwards, I was left more or less to my own wanton choice, but I know now that hard and difficult reading should have been compulsory. For a simple cat-sat-on-the-mat lesson, which I am still learning in my early fifties, though probably too late for constructive use, is that "they" are right who say the young must learn classics and higher mathematics even though they might be of no practical use in future life, because classics and higher mathematics give needed exercise to the brain and break down its resistances. I thought they were talking for the sake of talking, talking for effect, so I happily concentrated on the study of subjects where, my brain being already receptive, there was little need of either study or concentration: Literature, especially English

literature, History, Modern Languages; so when presently, the time came to read not for felicity alone, nor for escape nor excitement, nor for encounter with wit or beauty or strangeness, I found increasingly that a little hard crust formed round each first chapter, and I had to make an effort to burst it, or leave it. And during the war, and since my severe illnesses, I rejected such effort, and rationalized my indolence, my disgraceful longing for easier reading, by a phrase I delivered for effect: “I don’t care for reading”—Surely an amusing trait in an author of books? (And who was the first bus-man to say he did not care for bus-rides?)

But come now, was it all that amusing? Or had I merely added to my own dis-orientation by defining it; reinforcing the walls that shut me out from Paradise? For with my mental muscles slack from self-indulgence, I began to make a fuss about almost any sort of reading except the most delectable; somehow I had to cover my dismay and chagrin over what had happened to me. And then, as I have already mentioned, illness came, and trouble, and then the war, and more illness, and I became a re-reader instead.

But how does one define “difficult” reading? I have never defined it before, so must grope round trying this and that, while you wonder perhaps whether I am going to hit it right. Try this: difficult reading is reading for an unselfish motive outside the book itself, which may therefore be selected from among subjects for which you have no personal infatuation. But having had no education in difficult reading, and no one at hand during those critical early years who would open up for me those iron caskets sealed and roped and show me the treasure inside, I plumped for glowing gold and sparkling silver as Morocco and Aragon did (not that Shakespeare ever persuaded us that Bassanio, that young anti-Semitic fortune-hunter and yes-man, alone had the guts to choose not by the view). The iron casket warned me off its inside treasure by formidable words such as: Economics, Government, Housing, Statistics, Proletariat, Aggregate, Capitalism, etc., words certainly without magic or seduction—the Matriarch used to tell the young generation “Above all, one must seduce!” (I do not think she meant quite that.)

And so, with perhaps the right qualifications, I have missed the road to political endeavour which might have been my way, more my way than a career on the stage which was my juvenile

## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

"engine-driver" choice; and a deeper satisfaction than the power to write, to a conscience restless whenever the phrase "reconstruction after the war" is spoken in my hearing.

Is it too late? I have always suffered from a fear of thrusting myself into something new; a fear of not finding the right door, and refusing to enter by the wrong one with neither the cheek nor the self-confidence nor the self-forgetfulness to risk the ridicule which (so I thought) would inevitably arise from a bungling entrance. And admitted that I am too easily mortified and depressed by what does not matter, I have consequently had too much admiration for those fortunate people "who have their hands on all the ropes and know whom to send for" . . . the universal Wilcoxes of E. M. Forster's creation. I would enter politics, I believe, if I were sponsored by a Wilcox; carried in not by my own vitality, but by his. And once in, I could manage.

If, therefore, I were catapulted into politics, refusing to accept the mild acquiescence of "too late", what would my politics be and what would my party be? Liberal? Labour? Die-hard Tory? (A brief defence here for die-hards and the unconscious tragedy of their name: it *hurts* to die hard and painfully, and need not necessarily imply a Blimp, a crusty old obstructionist; die hard, but die for your faith, even though you would prefer to sink softly asleep as they used to announce death on the Continent—"sanft eingeschlafen").

I am aware, of course, that there is an Independent Party and wonder if I am being ingenuous to the verge of idiocy in asking whether that is the same as an Individualist Party? For when I trawled my nets down among my own deep-sea political opinions in search of a party fish, I caught a minnow and a mackerel and a skate . . . In plain words, no more solid convictions than an irrepressible longing that decent people should benefit from reconstruction and also set a lead how to obtain it. And by decent, I mean neither Labour nor Conservative, neither the haves nor the have-nots, neither the upper nor the lower classes, the professional nor the agricultural, the intelligentsia nor the industrial. I mean the decent people; the people on the side of the angels; the kind, reasonable, fair-minded people; not fearless but courageous (the fearless man is never brave; he does not have to be; nice for him!). The decent people, let them be our rulers. Some of them already are. And decency is not a vague term; it is (in that Socratic

style of stumping you at the outset) I am asked to define them, the people on the side of the angels, I will maintain that it is as simple as the cat-sat-on-the-mat. We can all of us instinctively recognize them as the people who mean good towards us; "well-meaning" is a word that has degenerated in use, but the Italians still say "ti vuol' bene". At least fifty per cent. of us are Socratic, so I will briefly define decency as integrity in alliance with potency, both qualities essential to build up a sturdy spiritual denominator. Potency alone can be dishonest; integrity alone is often ineffective.

I should want bureaucratic and impersonal control, however efficient, de-centralized and replaced by an imaginative consideration of the individual man and woman, and appreciative of good behaviour and endurance under individual circumstances. I do not want to be governed by the ruthless people, nor by the ancient-grudge chip-on-the-shoulder people; nor certainly by the people who say and believe: "We can't make exceptions." The dictum "we can't make exceptions" drives me into the same sort of rage as Blake and Ralph Hodgson at the thought of a caged bird, a blind pit-pony. Inflexibility is an attribute of the mentally defective, and should be recognized instead of exalted. Why can "we" not make exceptions? But I know the answer: it is rooted in a surly suspicion that exception is the same thing as privilege. It is *not* the same thing; every man can healthily consider himself to be an exceptional entity, a one-is-one, but privilege is a wholly different and much more reprehensible matter; to confuse the two provides an excuse for intolerance and petty tyranny; provides also such deadly forms of collective address as Everyman, the Man in the Street, the Common Man; usually going winsome for any summing up of the female herd: Mrs. Housewife, Granny-I-mean-you-too, Little Miss-Unmarried-Mother. "Individual" may sound like a fine cover for personal selfishness, personal benefit or personal power; I have no wish in politics to lead, to benefit or to exert power; but I am certain, now that I come face to face with the problem of my own opinions, that I desire to fight so as to enable the individually decent man and woman, in their maturity, to collect into a group or party for post-war reconstruction. And if I am told that this is an indolent dreamer's Utopia, and old-fashioned into the bargain, I will maintain fiercely that it is a sane, hopeful, lucid, down-to-earth idea; written in invisible ink wherever we choose to read; and needing



only the strong chemical of reassurance to bring it up clear and legible on the page, beneath the unromantic heading: "practical politics".

## CHAPTER VII

## "GREEN GROW THE RUSHES-O"

SO I did not follow up a political career. And I was discouraged from becoming a great actress or, indeed, any actress at all. Our daily help remarked to me the other day: "I suffers from the reactions", and remembering all I can of myself during the summer of 1907, that must have been my unexpressed complaint. I did not desire any more to be famous or an eloquent leader of men. I longed for romance, and waited expectantly for romance to turn up; which, of course, is no way to attract such a perverse fugitive from organized welcome.

My father had recently retired from business after the family crash in Vaal River Diamonds; at an age, therefore, when tradition would have surrounded me with the lilt of waltz tunes and the hum of preparation for a "coming-out ball", I was, instead, homeless; we moved about and lived aimlessly in hotels; for a brief while during the June and July after my A.D.A. collapse, I was without special intentions, without future plans and occupation, good or bad. Life was, in fact, literally a lack-lustre affair. Moreover, young snob that I was, I knew that the River was the perfect setting for a girl and a boy in a punt—a green pair in a green shade—and here was I, doomed (I said to myself dramatically) to be a daughter with elderly parents in a skiff. Prose versus poetry! My father loved the Thames nearly as much as he loved his wife, which is saying a great deal. Always they both held for him the same delicate glamour. He would hire for the season the best double skiff at the boathouse, place me ruthlessly to scull behind him, and my mother among the cushions facing him with the steering-ropes in her negligent hands—but she always forgot she was responsible, while her eyes wandered in search of a dozen friends and acquaintances also in boats—*Crash* into the bank while she waved gaily to Mrs. Dunkels; *crash* into the lock-gates while she picked up her lorgnon to identify Mr. and Mrs. Reggie Brookes on their lawn.

In the bow would be placed my final despair and humiliation : the tea-basket and all its laborious apparatus for family tea ; presently we moored to the bank between the roots of Father's favourite overhanging tree on the Cookham reach, about a mile up-stream from Boulter's Lock . . . I would give worlds, now that I am fifty-three, and long before then, for one of those river teas with Father in the swaying shade under the Cliveden woods ! But perhaps restless seventeen can be forgiven for fierce impatience and the feeling that parents were out of tune with those green and golden afternoons.

. . . The spirit-lamp, carefully lit, sheltered from every puff of wind by Father's bending solicitude, suddenly began to rock and spill and go out at the critical moment, because a queer cigar-shaped motor-boat *would* tear up and down that particular reach, churning up the water and sending wave after wave rolling towards either shore ; up and down, never just passing and vanishing into the distance towards Marlow and Henley as its speed entitled it to do, leaving my father in peace with our tea-kettle . . . "Damn !" Father muttered, glaring with furious blue eyes towards that infernal "cigar", so oblivious of our comfort, and presently "damn !" again and louder, as, thrashing the water, it hurled itself back along the same route during that equally critical moment of pouring out the tea. As though it mattered, I thought. Lunch, yes—from a professional hamper packed by Skindle's Hotel, and the neck of a slim bottle slanting out. For these were the dashing Edwardian days, when Skindle's and the lawn at Skindle's and the scandals at Skindle's and the Guards' Club opposite Skindle's, stood for a whole world of wickedness, fashion and fun ; the Merry Widow world : "I'm going to Maxim's", in the same spirit but not so coy any more as the Miller's Daughter in "Three Little Maids", five years before :

Fast and deep ran the water,  
But she was . . . faster still !

Not that I craved especially for what "fast" represented—(and further down the century : "hot stuff" ; and then : "tough baby"). I have not and have never had a Skindle's temperament, a Lido temperament, a Palm Beach and Eden Rock temperament. Waltzing to the tunes of Viennese musical comedy of Franz Lehar and Oscar Strauss and Leo Fall was nearer my ideas of love and laughter and all the rest of it, than sculling double in a family skiff

and moodily watching a kettle that tipped over just when it was about to boil; nevertheless, during that summer of my river Waiferage, I still envied the dreamy young couples far more than the fast Skindle's set; he in white shirt and flannels, indolently handling his punt-pole with one hand; she reposing full-length (a thing which you cannot do in a skiff) gazing up at him, smiling, trailing lazy fingers through the cool water . . . Now he's swinging the punt down that shadowy, sun-dappled backwater called Paradise . . . now they're out of sight . . . "You can pull harder than that," said my father who had taught me to use the sculls and was rather proud of my achievement in that line—"Put your back into it!"

But why should I put my back into it? All through that provocative summer of Junes and moons and a concert party warbling of coons (and their playful ways) on the raft moored to Skindle's lawn every night, romance came no nearer than once when crossing Maidenhead Bridge I heard footsteps drawing up behind me and a male voice that spoke a tentative: "Good evening". I quickened my pace, for I had been sedately brought up and knew at once that this must be a Bad Man. Certainly bad, for he persisted: "Haven't we met at the Skating Rink?" Just for a second I wondered, had we? Then reason reminded me that I had never been to a Skating Rink. "No," I replied with a crushing glance. Though I was now only a Waiferage girl and not any more a débutante in a big house at Holland Park, my conventional training still held and would not let me "pick up" pleasure where and how I found it; the Bad Man and I had not been introduced—that was enough. But he was tenacious: "You don't mind my going for a little walk with you now, do you?" "Yes, I object very strongly. I don't know you and I don't want to." He fell away then. I expect he was a little discouraged.

In the mornings, Father rarely took out the boat and I could have free use of it. In my year of mooching between leaving school and leaving the A.D.A. and becoming a writer, I had gone slack, gone native (of Maidenhead), and was hardly aware that during the morning one should never and never be free to take out a boat. Certainly Father said to me regularly every day: "Have you heard anything yet?" Have-you-heard-anything-yet meant, I knew, anything about a stage engagement: anything from the Actor-Manager of His Majesty's Theatre: anything about a big salary and rehearsals to start almost at once? . . . He

was a realist over most matters, and had opposed my idea of going on the stage; but I believe my sister, who backed my ardent claims, had stuffed him up with a notion that a career would automatically follow training, and all he had to do was to pay the fees for four terms. So—"Have you heard anything yet?" "No . . . not yet." Mr. Beerbohm Tree was certainly taking his time about it!

Meanwhile, with three volumes of poetry of the Pierrotic period, I would scull down alone to the backwater called Paradise, during these hours empty of other boats, pull up and make fast with some skill to the palisade of a little flight of marble steps leading to nowhere, and flumping down comfortably on all the cushions, surrender mind and body and soul to solitude. I think, looking back, that "body" got the best of it; the exercise and then the solitude and the loveliness of the stream really did help to soothe all that adolescent turmoil and dissatisfaction; "mind" was not receiving much—it needed direction; and soul was simply a morass of dreams patched with gold and purple, with king-cups, flag irises and marsh marigolds—or do I mean marshmallows?

Summer was over, that unprofitable summer; and having no home (the dirge keeps recurring) my parents went to Switzerland for the winter and dragged me along with them . . .

They chose Montreux, where I had been at a finishing school two years before. The lake and the mountains were more bracing than the backwaters of the Thames, and as Romance was still behaving in the offhand, vagrant style of a kingfisher whom by rumour somebody else had seen some time, somewhere, I made a vain attempt to put salt on its tail: I pleaded for leave to accept an invitation from a pretty, friendly little German woman staying at the same hotel, who asked me to go presently and stay with her at Pforzheim and she would introduce me, she declared, to a great many charming young men who would all fall madly in love with the little English girl.

Romance beckoned, tantalized me. Of course Pforzheim was the place . . . "It" was waiting at Pforzheim . . . As I come down the great staircase (of the Bahnhof, presumably) they will be flinging flowers and chocolates and necklaces, and singing waltz tunes by Lehar and Strauss and Fall! All the same, I think Father was mad to let me go. I was still only eighteen and, as you will have seen, unsophisticated and absurd in most of my ideas; and he knew nothing of my pretty friendly little German hostess, nor

that she was aiming for a divorce from her husband and greedy to establish him in the wrong and herself as more sinned against than sinning. This innocent little English girl suddenly to be introduced into the very heart of the home might, with a little manipulation, solve her problem. For Eugen was susceptible.

That I ever escaped to safety with my reputation still as white as the maiden's nightgown in "The Soul's Awakening", was due partly to luck, partly to the fact that I was too suddenly scared (her motive ought to have appeared more gradually), and mostly to a kindly, ironic warning from her husband's ne'er-do-well brother to clear out at once and learn some more about life before I paid visits to strangers in a strange town in a strange country. I was terribly thankful to get back to Switzerland and to Father's protective care; and very soon afterwards, probably because I was not looking in the direction of romance, it revealed itself in true Blue Bird style as having been present all the time. Only how could I possibly have recognized it, dashing up and down the river in a cigar-shaped motor-boat, never going far so that it could the sooner return and pass me again and again? At last, rendered desperate by lack of progress and personal encounter, romance had accosted me as I was crossing Maidenhead Bridge . . .

It was all perfectly authentic. His name was Leslie; he was thirty-one. He owned a motor-car and a motor-boat, and in 1907 this was splendour indeed! He had fallen in love at first sight; had been watching me all through that apparently empty summer. But I was always so closely guarded, and he could, so to speak, make no headway except by upsetting Father's spirit-lamp with the wash of his boat every day at tea-time.

Looking back at it all from a mature age, his technique appears to me a little faulty. Even if the backwater where I went alone in the mornings was too shallow for his motor-boat to penetrate, surely he could have abandoned it for an hour or two and hired a punt and shot into those green, gold-filtered shades like a young god in white flannels, using only one hand for his punt-pole, a hamper from Skindle's half concealed by the cushions!

Still, I was not likely at eighteen to be critical of romance, now that at last it had come. My soul sang and my heart bled as I realized how I had rebuffed him, and read in my sister's letter how he had been overcome by despair, yet not too overcome to go on watching and noticing there was one house at which I often visited; and in the fulness of time he had manœuvred an introduction to

the lady of the house (which could not have been difficult, for she was charming and frail. Mother and Father were always tolerant of moral frailty for the sake of charm and good company—and what did they care, being themselves so faithfully and happily married!) Too late! I had already been borne off to Switzerland, and all that the frail lady could do was to introduce him to my married sister— Where at that very moment, he had arrived to spend the week-end with his future in-laws. For he was, she wrote, absolutely determined to marry me the moment I came home.

And so he might have, for there was nothing particularly wrong with him, except that he had a long nose and was not very intelligent. And this description of his Romeo-awakening to love at first sight and his steadfast determination to wait, whatever befall, for his undowered little bride from the Waiferage, coincided with the scenery of Lac Lemman, the snowy crests of the Dent du Midi and the Rochers de Naye, and the whole range of the Jura Mountains opposite, rosy against a sunset sky, white sails across the water, reflections of Chillon dipping and wavering, and (from the Kursaal) the soft lilt of a waltz refrain by Lehar, by Strauss, by Fall . . .

All my soreness was healed in a moment. It was all so beautifully in the Rakonitz family tradition: "That one and no other", my aunts and great-aunts used to repeat, when they described with animation and innocent vainglory how their husbands saw them and fell for them like a ton of bricks—"That one and no other!" Leslie . . . lapping waves beneath my window . . . In the early spring we were to go back to England . . . Then we would be married, he and I (and there would be no need for me to Renounce my Career, as Mr. Beerbohm Tree had still not made a sign).

And indeed we might have been, as I said before, but for a lack of foresight on the part of my ardent lover when on every fine afternoon for three months he had upset my father's teakettle . . . a far more serious business than his apple-cart! Lord Ullin and the Chief of Ulva's Isle were nothing to it, nor Young Lochinvar who swam the Esk River for ford there was none: "Then spake the bride's father, his hand on his sword" . . . All no use; you may be eligible, you may be respectful, you may do everything in your power to placate the hard-hearted parent of a beloved who is still below the age of consent, but if you have once got it wrong, as wrong as Leslie and his "cigar" tearing up and down the river reach between Boulter's Lock and Cookham, you

might as well give up from the start. Father never forgave him, never failed to glower at his approach, to make it difficult or impossible for "that man" to see me or be alone with me. A nice double skiff and sculling with his family to that special tree and there tying up, lighting the spirit-lamp very carefully and putting on the kettle and preparing our picnic tea—that was Father's Paradise, a rival to Leslie's, and destiny had so arranged it that one had to upset the other. The most elementary psychology can teach us, with examples from the Greek Drama and the Old Testament, from King Lear and Capulet and Mr. Barrett of Wimpole Street, that whereas the worldly side of a father wishes to see his daughter married, his fundamental instincts are all against it and prepared to rise like hackles and growl at the first hint of an enthusiastic suitor. Fathers have to be handled with the greatest subtlety by any prospective son-in-law; with a deference, a care, a swiftness to note reactions—

After we were reunited at my sister's house, Leslie pursued his wooing for a surprisingly long time, considering that it was more like an obstacle race heavily handicapped. Then, sadly, he gave up and vanished. Many years later, when we were both married and mature, I happened to meet him again; and he explained, still sorrowfully, still dead in earnest, that nothing would have made him give up except a sort of dim idea which had begun to penetrate, that Mr. Stern did not like him very much.

A trite reflection that it takes a typhoon, an earthquake or several thousand years of unhurried glacier movement to alter nature's landscape, whereas we humans can change beyond recognition, within and without, in less than thirty-five years, rose in my mind last summer when I was going downstream from Marlow towards Cookham on a peaceful afternoon in July. It was two hours later, by that curious trick of double summer-time, than it would have been when I was a young girl on the only occasion we had managed to scull as far: from Taplow along the Cliveden Reach, through Cookham Lock and over the broad sailing waters at Bourne End. I do not know what is the ordinary lifetime of an ordinary swan (not the Lohengrin kind) but it is very likely that those haughties floating and balancing and dipping their necks for fish in an eternal Swan Ballet in the weir and pool at Marlow were descendants of the swans who had always frightened me in 1908 ("Show them the boat-hook," said Father—I still wonder why he always said

"show them the boat-hook" when swans came too near?). What a glorious time they had, those swans of the weir, sliding down the race or washing themselves reflectively on the edge of the gleaming horseshoe where the water poured over. Last summer I noticed one goose who went about with them everywhere without apparently being troubled by any inferiority complex; a privileged goose, perhaps, who was uplifted morally by the heritage of a special law known as the Grey Goose Feather: a goose is the only domestic animal on the public highway to whom all traffic must give way, for if they run him down, they, not he, are in the wrong, whatever the circumstances. That is enough, surely, to stuff any goose with proper pride long before his hour of stuffing. The reason, of course, is symbolic and not sensible, and dates from the period when the goose provided England with its most valuable munition of war . . . At Senlac, at Bannockburn, at Crécy and Poitiers and Agincourt, the grey goose-feather shafted the bow and arrow.

Certainly at fifty-two I had a quieter mind and a more admirable sense of proportion to appreciate river tranquillity than at eighteen; for it would not have occurred to me to fret and rage over the trivial snobberies that long ago had frayed my mind. Now I was able to enjoy the sound of my paddle as I dipped it in and lifted it out, and the still reflection in the water of the tall wood-pile on barges along the shore, and the rough warm husky smell of the planks. On the opposite bank, under the eaves of a derelict boat-shed moored to the land, I noticed that a settlement of swallows had made their nests in a row. The parent birds never went far but were watchfully swooping in and out all the time. And from up the backwater came that fresh, damp, cool river-smell that gives you such a strange longing to be *there* where you already are, so it must be really a longing for something beyond; for peace in our time, perhaps, or for some firm reassurance that one will be on the river again next summer, or for some still more intangible joy connected with youth and boat-sounds and little water-animals.

River magic endures; and it need not always be the Thames, nor any river in England. I was in South Carolina in 1936, and at sunset one evening I was taken on the swamp in a punt to be shown the ducks; a darkie boy sat behind me, unseen, dipping his paddle. He existed as a soft voice which at intervals mildly, caressingly, put me right when I spoke of a "duck"—"Ma'am,



you mean a coot". Coots flapped along the top of the water; ducks, mallard and canvas-back rose and flew singly or in twos and threes across the wide savannahs of the South Carolina sky; a scurrying in the reeds . . . and silence again; then suddenly for no apparent cause, with a twitter and thrash of wings, a wild rustling from all around, hundreds of blackbirds lifted into the air. I wondered what was that bush with trailing branches of dark-red berries, but could not be bothered to ask; floating flat leaves like the water-lily plant, but they were not water-lilies. The punt pushed its way down narrow channels beset with weeds and reeds, then into the clear broad pools, still and empty, which only reflected the sunset clouds. A negro lad in a faded coral-red shirt ran swiftly along the landscape with a gun—Paused at the edge of the wood—What had he heard? He was unbelievably like a figure from any page I had ever read about the Southern States. So was my darkie with his paddle, squatting at the end of the punt behind me. So was the avenue of live oaks draped in grey Spanish moss, the sun pouring from the West setting fire to its luminous fringes as we had walked down to the swamp. The darkie boy did not even sing; probably warbling would have been discouraged by the serious duck-shooters, as much as an operatic caddy by golfers on the tee.

Duck-shooting always makes me think of Hugo on his holidays when he was a boy, at his home in Suffolk. I must try to write of Hugo without being sentimental, even without remembering him too vividly, but that will be difficult. He first springs into memory rushing to meet and welcome me, a cocktail in either hand, so proud to be host in his own rooms at last. Shy, too, for of course I was old, a friend of his mother, and this was a young party—two or three dozen boys and two or three pretty girls; a nice proportion. I expect he had asked me as a graceful gesture because I had given him a cocktail-shaker, monogrammed, on his twenty-first birthday—no, I am already forgetting, that birthday was afterwards; but the sight of Hugo plunging towards me, only to discover, laughing, embarrassed, charming, that he had no free hand to offer because of the over-brimming cock-tails . . . gave me that queer moment of encountering a face one already knows intimately, the dark, clear-cut, arresting face of a very handsome woman not much younger than oneself, and seeing it suddenly, the same face, the same clean tilt of the head and beautiful line of the jaw, transformed to a boy of twenty. For

I had not seen Hugo Calthrop since he was twelve, when his resemblance to Gladys was only latent. He was killed in Burma during those weeks of disaster following the fall of Singapore. He and his men were suddenly surrounded at dawn by a pest and chatter of Japs who outnumbered them by five to one. Hugo was last seen "rushing out of his tent, his tommy-gun under his arm", a description by one of the men who had so valued him that they came back dangerously to search in vain after the fight was over and the Japs had gone; a description giving me the same picture, the same joyful flash as of Hugo rushing forward, eager and welcoming, a cocktail in each hand.

I could add of him that he was affectionate, sensitive, sincere, keen, and showed promise as an architect; but it reads altogether too like a headmaster's report, and rules out that life which so abundantly informed him. "Nimble and light of limb, in three elements free, to run, to ride, to swim"—If we are dead honest, might there not be now, in our manner of quoting Bishop Beecching's last line, an inflection of bitterness? "Take the thanks of a boy" . . . for a second world-war only twenty years after the first.

Yet with whom can we be bitter?

When he was twelve, I asked Gladys if she could let me have some expert information on duck-shooting in Suffolk, for one of my novels: "I'll pass it on to Hugo," she said, "he's the expert."

Hugo wrote: "Here's all I know: you start and get up at six o'clock and make some hot tea, and something to eat, dress and row downstream and land and tie up your boat, and shoot from the shore, you land about 7.15 just as it is getting light, you shoot in December, January, November and February, generally after a spell of very frosty weather is best.

"Your boat is a gunning punt which is a low boat 18' long and 3' 6" at the broadest end with a cockpit about 7' long, the rest being decked in, it has 4" clearance from the water and a 'coaming' or raised edge round the cockpit. It has a big or punt gun, mounted in front, but this you won't use. You take with you a 12-bore gun, using 3<sup>x</sup> cartridges. You row your punt sitting on the after-deck and you land on the mud at the edge, joining the marsh and the estuary, and you wait shivering in the darkness. As it gets lighter and lighter you hear widgeon flying over, the drakes whistling a shrill 'weeoh', the ducks making a purring note. And teal with a low double whistle, and mallard

with their quacking notes. You hear the whistling of their wing-beats, but you can't see them; as it gets lighter you see a glimpse of duck, and you shoot at it. If you're lucky you get it and it splashes as it falls in the water, or with a dull noise on the mud. And you go on shooting at intervals until it is quite light, when it's all over. On a good day you get 20 shots and bill say 8 duck, or perhaps on a bad day you bill about 2 duck from 10 shots. By duck I mean mixed widgeon, teal and mallard. When you fire your first shot you quite likely hear a splash and quack-quack, as a party of duck feeding on the shore near gets up and flies away, or a redshank with its disturbing whistle flies off. Duck fly either singly (rarely) or in pairs or usually in flocks of from 20-60. When you paddle back in the daylight you see the duck swimming in thousands out in the middle of the estuary, and maybe you hear a curlew or cur-lee, while corncrakes sit on all the buoys. It has a queer dark smell in the morning."

It has a queer dark smell in the morning.

Boys can be happy and carefree on a river, even during a war if they may forget it for an hour or two. After Marlow last summer, I stayed at Shillingford; and there, just below the bridge, three grey arches with their reverse half-moons reflected in the water, I saw two boys of about thirteen, stripped to the waist, idly splashing about in a dinghy. The one was dark, the other very fair. Both were much too thin. They were making jokes, not in English but in some queer tongue, so that you were especially glad they had escaped from a place where probably it was not so safe for joking as on the Thames glimmering just below Shillingford Bridge. The sun was setting, and one of the two, the fair one, suddenly became aware of the prevailing quiet, and hushed the other . . . They rested on their sculls and looked round them in great contentment. It was not quiet, of course; it could not be, with reeds and bulrushes moving all round, willows and poplars, a complacent moorhen, a quacking fleet of duck, swish and lap of water against the stern of the dinghy, boats going bump, bump against the landing-stage . . . The usual river symphony; but what made that foreign boy aware of the multitudinous silence surrounding him, might well have been the familiar sounds broken by an unfamiliar sound belonging more to forest and Down and field, when a boy of about their own age, English by his looks, also half-naked, rode a pony over the bend of the bridge. Clop, clop,

the pony passed on. Presently it was followed by a large armoured car driven by a girl. The river spell was broken, and the two foreign youngsters started to joke and chatter and to laugh boisterously, zigzagging the dinghy all across the stream from the edge of the lawn to the towing-path, enjoying the disturbance they made. A bomber rushed through the air overhead. War and peace—I cannot tell how I received the impression, but I knew that the two boys in the dinghy had been through some contrasting hell before they reached sanctuary, and could not as yet, not quite as yet, take river fun carelessly for granted as Hugo had, duck-shooting in Suffolk during his Christmas holidays.

Still, and without any ironic bitterness this time, take the thanks of a boy—for sanctuary.

The Thames also supplied the only instance in my rough notes of what history calls: “rude and licentious soldiery”. I had been waiting in hushed expectation all through this war for a personal encounter with the English “rude and licentious”; but down the length and breadth of the county they did not seem to exist, and I had almost given them up as a legend, started perhaps by three or four badly-behaved fellows in the Wars of the Roses: a bold Yorkist who took advantage of a pretty Lancastrian maiden when she gave him the come-hither but not too hither. My final hope had been during some big manœuvres in Berkshire, when about three dozen men of the ooth Field Regiment, R.A., had been billeted on us in the cottage at Ruston Copthall; and after asking courteous permission several times, made themselves comfortable in the garage and round the kitchen premises. Naturally we expected at any moment that they would become “rude and licentious”, but they remained in their general behaviour like the prize class in a girls’ school, obedient to their form-mistress and their prefects. Indeed, it was very disappointing! I had a secretary and a friend staying with me, aged eighteen and twenty-eight, comely young women; but the rude and licentious soldiery never even lifted their eyes except for a modest “thank you” when given a glass of beer or a cup of tea. Always they carried it away to drink out of sight behind the barn, and duly returned it, washed, with another polite “thank you”. After four disappointing days of this sort of thing, four evenings when after a stroll we picked our way home over the camping-ground of weary bodies lying full length between our gates and the porch, their orders came suddenly to move on.

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Not so suddenly, however, but that all their litter was first cleared up, and the Officer-in-Command said goodbye to each of us separately and begged to be told if anything had been broken or marked during their stay, and: "thank you so much for making everything so pleasant for us and so comfortable". He added, most earnestly, that the War Office's one longing was to compensate property-owners and promptly adjust complaints.

Well, certainly there were no complaints from us except the one which I am making now, and which I could hardly put into official language: "Could the next batch please be a little more licentious? Not too much; just a little."

A few days later I had a letter from the officer, who had been handsome enough to colour any young girl's dreams: he thanked us again for our hospitality and begged again to be allowed to provide compensation for damage done during their stay. Hoping for an excuse to continue this delicious correspondence, we had one more frantic search round the garage and adjoining offices, sheds, etc., which had recently hummed with manœuvres, conspiracies, messages by wireless and private lines . . . Perhaps at least we could find a torn map with "X marks my bedroom window" scribbled in the margin. And we *did* find a scribbled-over notebook with most of its leaves gone, the rest quite incomprehensible statements in Jabberwocky. So we wrote to the officer telling him of this well-thumbed treasure and asked for an exact address to which it should be returned registered? I think we felt the fate of the war hung on this, but he cannot have had my letter, and I have kept the relic which somehow has acquired a romantic look.

And then, as I said before, the "rude and licentious soldiery" out of history-book, turned up in flesh and blood one evening on the lawn beside the river. They had come shouting and bumping along in boats, and only stayed for a crowded half-hour to bathe and to enjoy themselves after their fashion. The hotel had acquired a very agreeable barge, I think it was the old Magdalen barge, which was moored permanently by the lawn for their visitors' pleasure. The gilt and the figurehead and the curly-dragon sort of look lent a delectable old-fashioned atmosphere to the river; you felt that at any moment the gentlemen in tilted straw boaters, blazers and cummerbund and moustaches, would come sauntering along to escort the ladies, in tilted straw boaters, tight bodices and long swishing skirts. Instead, I was faintly startled to run into a

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small group of "toughs" naked (except perhaps for stray wisps where Regulations insisted on a stray wisp); hairier bodies than I have ever seen bodies at home or abroad, their owners uninhibited in gesture or language, shouting with full lungs to their unclothed comrades bathing and diving from the bridge. One of the men in particular, a lusty giant, swarthy and jovial, kept on dancing about and bawling loud provocative challenges to a soldier standing on the parapet but unwilling to dive. The monologue had to travel at least two hundred yards into the air, but the man was wholly without consciousness of an audience and therefore very pleasant and instructive to watch. What he did not bawl he mimed in disconcerting realism. At last, still yelling rude and licentious messages up to the bridge, he melted away (not literally) behind a bush, no doubt to put his trousers on. Meanwhile, a few of the hotel guests began to trickle out to bathe. It was a glorious evening with a flame-coloured sky and all the usual accompaniments. A holiday girl, tall, merry, well-shaped—not Artemis, but Hera—left her boy-friend swimming while she repeatedly climbed up the bank to dive in again and again. She paused, as divers always do, silhouetted, before she sprang. A boat-load of soldiers pulled out noisily from behind the barge. One of them, our friend, the bold and hairy one again only half-naked, turned and saw the girl. She remained perfectly serene, aware, I think, of the compliments that her figure merited. But he watched in silence, and she dived. Then, as she came up again, his tongue was released: "Thanks for de memory" he called out. "Old Joe wants to tell you: Thanks for de memory" . . .

They rowed away upstream, splashing the water with their sculls, roaring with laughter. Yet from the distance he had to stand up once more perilously in the bows, to call out to the holiday girl "Thanks for de memory" . . . dying away round the bend.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NOWADAYS

**S**TAYING on the River during that summer of 1942, I began to notice with some emphasis that girls had changed since my young days (I had been wondering for a long time when

I should begin to think like this, and whether I should try to prevent myself from saying so: Apparently not). I have lived, since the war began, in the same house with girls of eighteen and nineteen. They seemed to be taking life unyouthfully, or at any rate without physical enterprise or enthusiasm. I came to the conclusion that to get up early, to care for nature's amazing parade, to love eating or drinking out of doors, to bathe, to go in boats and for walks and even to the other end of the garden, are pastimes that belong to the middle-aged, to the forties and fifties—health permitting—and that must be why I only noticed the difference when I myself reached that age.

The young girls going into the World War appear temporarily set on a negative course. They do their work well, but their pleasures and freedoms, so far as I could see without asking, consisted of *not* getting up, *not* exploring in the rain, *not* bathing nor dragging the boat out, *not* picking flowers nor climbing hills. I neither could nor should criticize them, because I know they have been cheated as a generation, cheated of their fun, and I believe they have minded slightly more than the young men; and I felt dreadfully apologetic, though I suppose it was not altogether my fault (please note that "altogether"! ). And indeed, much the same thing happened to me when I was twenty-four and the last world-war crashed out over our heads. These girls cannot have their light-hearted good time prettily decorated with plans for dancing, for holidays, for new *unservicable* clothes (*unservicable* in every sense), and shopping, and lights in the street. Their silk-stockings time. And perhaps because they know more surely every year of the war that they will be called up soon, or volunteer soon, to a life of physical stress and physical adventure and physical hardship, to a life of danger even, and to utter unselfishness, they were subconsciously husbanding their forces, not squandering them, setting themselves stubbornly against all little minor playtime enterprises. To go out and walk in the rain, bathe in cold streams and rivers, exhaust bodies and tire limbs battling against the wind and nature—why should they call these things fun and adventure, when they are not fun and adventure any more? Soon enough it will all be coming to them as reality; then they will do what they must and do it well. Meanwhile, a certain obstinate listlessness was how I interpreted their attitude: stay indoors, stay in bed, stay dry, rest, read, do part of to-day's crossword . . .

The twentieth-century crossword education calls for a footnote and an instance: the clue is "battle colour", the answer discovered by not-quite-eighteen without ever having heard of it: "Solferino". It had to be verified by the dictionary; not, of course, for information's sake, but if it chanced to be wrong it would complicate the whole of that corner. "Yes, it's all right!" triumphantly, "... 'a purplish-red colour discovered in the year of the battle of Solferino'." An offhând way to pick up education, but from the point of view of the girls of the 1940's, any steady recurring distraction was better than setting out in search of makeshift fun when fun itself was lost.

Rest and read and do our crosswords; make ourselves an underslip from that piece of crêpe de Chine luckily left over from Auntie's birthday present; and when we have a chance, wash and set our hair, make up our faces, choosing the colour of the lipstick with care; count our coupons, and go all out for life and the shops—stray bits and fragments of fun when we should have had the whole pattern. Nature? No, thanks. Nature is all very well, but hardly what we mean by fun—nowadays.

I was first surprised, and then not surprised at all, that nature had only a very slight appeal to anyone young, except the traditional "dreamy" girl. Nature is a compensation when you are middle-aged and growing elderly; and new forms of physical enterprise have triumph mixed in with them by proving (to ourselves, mostly) that we are not yet so old, after all; for look how we dash into the rain, haul out the boat, positively enjoying it still, while the young ones remain indoors looking up with a laconic "How was it?" as you come in glowing, a little despising them... till you remember how soon they will be doing first-class efficient jobs in the Navy, the Army and the Air Force.

"And what are you doing to-night?" "Got an A.R.P. lecture that I mustn't miss." "Dear me," said the old gentleman on a pitying note, "it can't be helped, I suppose, but it must be a very dull subject: ... a very dull subject," shaking his head. The girl hesitated, seeking for words; but either she was inarticulate or did not think it worth while to explain, for she simply said "Oh, no," fairly politely, and walked off.

I guessed, when I heard this brief dialogue, what might be in her mind. An A.R.P. lecture: either this is the dullest subject in the world or the most exciting—it could be nothing between.



Either it assumed with a perfectly commonplace air that at any moment you, yes you yourself, would be mixed up with crashing walls, blazing houses, men overhead literally doing their best to kill you and the men and women and children round you; smashed bodies, bleeding heads—half a minute left to dash to the rescue and pull someone out—less than half a minute—every ambulance gone—then an emergency tourniquet, quick! Take no notice when that roof has just fallen in. Send a message, it's vital, for the emergency squad. Never mind that delayed action bomb, it *may* not explode yet! . . .

An A.R.P. lecture: dear me, that must be a *very* dull subject!

Nothing is static, and least of all our sense of values. We are cleaning out the Augean Stables with a vengeance, though I suspect from domestic experience nowadays that what they wanted for the Augean Stables was not Hercules, but a daily help for two hours every morning. For nowhere have these values been so tragically upset and then subconsciously re-organized, as over the question of running a house. It was in 1941 that I received a printed amendment slip stuck on to a form from a Registry Office, with the solemn statement of a huge but necessary increase of fees for supplying "second and under-housemaids, kitchen, scullery and between-maids and footmen". No increase, you may have noticed, for the lordly ones (how beautiful they were): for the butlers, housekeepers, upper housemaids and chefs. The little people have come into their own at last; and the *between-maid* so rare and costly—between what-and-what would she function, glamorous and madly expensive, in this fourth year of the war? As for catering, nowadays, the situation is entirely covered by the old saying: "If we had some ham we'd have ham and eggs if we had some eggs!"

In mid-January, 1943, my secretary entered in some excitement! She had seen a bit of rhubarb lying in a road in Mayfair, and following the trail, discovered that eventually, by more scatterings of rhubarb, it led her to a small and hitherto unknown greengrocer's where she was able to buy the precious fruit itself (or should it be vegetable? Or is rhubarb one of those borderline growths, a product of the kitchen-garden Waifage?). With this bulletin, she interrupted a telephone conversation in a not dissimilar strain between Marguerite Steen and myself: less a dialogue between two novelists than between two ardent trappers in a primitive land.

She had had a haunch of venison sent to her by another trapper from a savage country from a savage kingdom in the North (Scotland, probably), and so she might possibly spare me a chicken if her housekeeper had succeeded in shooting a nice Boiler. I then told her how over the week-end I had snared the last bottle in all England, of Gordon's Lemon Gin and left the village inn-keeper weeping with gratitude at my promise to send him a present of tea. "I don't never get enough tea," he whispered brokenly, with a hunted look over his shoulder as though he were confessing to some lurid trade in gun-running. Marguerite was interested to learn that this was the third licensed house in Southern England where tea was the most precious and the most welcome of all gifts, in spite of shelf after shelf decorated with exotic bottles of all shapes and colours and labels: "Dantziger Goldwasser"—they read like the B.B.C. announcer giving us the war news from the occupied countries of Europe. Unlike the poet who was a little ashamed to realize that wherever he went, he still would find his "warmest welcome at the Inn", I on the contrary am rather proud to think of the English country inn as a familiar spot of warmth and geniality.

The deepest sorrow of catering under increasing difficulties has little to do with appetite, for indeed the Food Minister has kept his word not to let us go hungry; but the check on our hospitality violates all our natural instincts to keep open house and to put before friends and strangers, without any fuss, the best we have to offer. Nowadays we have painfully learnt that it simply cannot be done, not even by sacrifice and going short ourselves. Luckily, however, it is a lesson that all have had to learn without exception, so that at least our wry tones are mutual and we do not have to apologize or explain or cover up deficiencies one from the other. In fact, the broadly comic element emerges as we need to speak more and more frankly, accustomed now to throwing away tradition and saying to the invited guest: "Sorry, I'm afraid after all I can't have you. There's nothing to eat. They promised me some plaice if they had any by 11 o'clock this morning, but they hadn't, and even if they had we'd used up all our frying fat when we had to have bubble-and-squeak last night because Nan was too tired to go out." I remember another 'phone conversation on those lines which sounded quite natural to both Rosemary and myself at either end, though it would have been absolutely incredible in pre-war days. I was just explaining that I did not think I could possibly manage to give them dinner for Humphrey's birthday

because— But at this moment, enter my secretary triumphantly with her gun and game bag (I ought to have been dictating my book, of course, but the morning hours are not quite as sacred as they used to be). This time she had “brought down” two quails and a pigeon, a tin of Brand’s chicken essence and a jar of false (ersatz) cream. Now we *are* all right, birthday dinner and all! Now we can knock out my provisional rather forlorn idea of a spaghetti cheese, spattered with bits of the bacon which were too salt to eat apart. Now I can also give Kay for lunch to-day when she arrives late from the country, the rest of the cold game-pie bought last week, and have a slice of the cold lamb myself before she arrives, because it looks so bad not to share it, only it *is* our meat ration and we *have* already shared it with my publisher yesterday, he protesting strongly in the formula we all use: “No, no, I couldn’t *possibly* eat your meat (butter, jam, eggs, biscuits, sugar).” And there will be the rest of the liver sausage for “whoever wants it”, and salad, and we’ll open the jar of pickled pears which I bought months ago at the Garden Fair at Ruston Copthall in aid of Russia. The postman came just then with an opportune parcel of Bramley Pippins, ordered (also months ago) from our postman in the country; so I gave Rosemary a tantalizing hint of a sweet I should be able to give her, flavoured with Maraschino, if she could manage to contribute some raisins? And rang off with a confident: “See you to-morrow about 7.30, then!” Providence had tossed up a decent if eccentric menu for a war-time dinner in winter in London; and I could see nothing parsimonious in my secretary’s suggestion that I could even start with some excellent soup, as she was going to clean the little wee birds and they would surely yield up infinitesimal offal.

I owed Humphrey and Rosemary a special birthday dinner because they had proudly treated me to a “birthday cake” last June. I could hardly believe it when I saw its dark richness as though stuffed with plums and spices, the jelly on top and the legend “Many Happy Returns” with my name and date on it. Nor was I in the least disappointed when it turned out to be a “cake” beautifully contrived on a rabbit foundation, not sweet but spicy, the congratulations written on aspic, in radish and tomato.

An odd exchange and barter in food, wholly unembarrassed, has been born of war-time embarrassments: the sausages of the brother-in-law of the cook appear on the breakfast-table, rather special sausages, not Black Market nor anti-regulation, but just the

result of some mysterious gift to invoke sausages that do not taste all of bread. His wife often gets taken poorly, so we return thanks in terms of brandy, a few thimblefuls. "She won't never drink it, but she do like to know it's *there*," and I perfectly understand. I, too, like to know it is there. Those seven milk-chocolate creams, each carefully wrapped in several face-tissues, were sent to me by a Canadian from his home hamper. We met by chance in Cornwall, and I discovered he was a book addict who carried Montaigne and Thoreau wherever he went. Here I did not return in solids, but stuffed him with enough book talk (and no face-tissues required) to satisfy his lust till the next hamper arrived. I shall remember him best by his trick of going downstairs to the bar at six o'clock in the morning to help himself to a large bottle of cider, intending then to go for a long walk over the cliffs towards Tintagel. He always felt dreamy after the cider, so he returned to bed where he slept peacefully for another three hours. I tried to persuade him to take the cider upstairs the evening before, and not bother himself with his long-early-walk-across-the-cliffs delusion, but it did not give him so much pleasure to leave that out.

Somebody once gave me a basket of onions, pink and purple and mother-of-pearl. They will go to Paradise; the donors, I mean, not the onions. Somebody else, three days before jam rationing came in, lifted up the 7-lb. jar of plum jam which I had acquired in breathless awe but quite legitimately, and said he would "put it in a safer place", and it fell from his hands and was shattered to fragments on the stone floor. I told him then, but gently, that Paradise was not his destination; but time has softened the blow and I expect that in the ultimate reckoning it will not count so heavily against him. What, after all, is jam? What are carrots? That depends . . . I was shown an exercise-book the other day in which a child wrote "he gave her a ring of 22 carrots" . . .

A young sailor gave Kate a bottle of Benedictine with the earnest recommendation: "It's been torpedoed twice." One had heard in the old days that sherry was improved by travelling three times round the world—and here was a new proud requisite evolved from the uncertainties of war. Yes, "it's a queer time"—the refrain of one of Robert Graves's poems about the last war. Filed as though it were a precious document, I found among my correspondence a note from a young naval officer (recently returned from the Middle East and apparently helping the Admiralty to

get good fish for lunch), a personal introduction to a renowned fishmonger, warning me: "they close at 1 o'clock sharp as by then they will have sold *both* their prawns".

It is not so much the actual and of course essential change in our habits of food and drink, entertainment and acceptance, which have changed from the normal; but the topsy-turvy shape of our minds could we but stand away from them and take a full objective view. On points, you can buy Prem, Spam and Japhet; so it was unworthy of my spiritual attitude towards life to feel quite such a sinking disappointment after an American friend, a member of the Red Cross staff, rang me up to say he was bringing me a "pheasant"—"A pheasant? But how glorious!" "No, no, a *present*." Less glorious, because it might prove only to be a toy watering-pot or china mascot. But when he arrived with an extremely charming woman whom I had not seen for several years, and playfully said: "Look what I've brought you!" how easily I could have wept. So this was his "*present*"—just a mutual friend, just another woman like myself. Still more unworthy was my elation when his hand drew from behind his back . . . a large-sized miracle, pale gold, looking like a lemon.

It *was* a lemon! The girl friend had been merely a sideline. I gazed at it, sort of stupefied, and then laid it reverently on the sideboard under my Florentine picture of still life: a group of two oranges, one peeled; a bunch of grapes, a glass of wine and I *think* an oyster patty, but there has been argument over this. There lay the real lemon at last, to mock the picture. The next twenty-four hours were spent in debating as to how we could best use it. In all, it divided into seven ways, and the best way was the oyster way. Provisionally I 'phoned Louis and Leueen and invited them both to lunch with me at B.'s, if B.'s still had oysters, and if they both liked oysters, and if Mr. B. would not be offended if I brought my own lemon, offering to pay lemonage. Louis and Leueen both refused, at such short notice, until the word "*lemon*" appeared. Then, barefaced (as I should have been myself) they both accepted enthusiastically, Leueen remarking that she could quite easily put off Lady F., when she explained that she had been invited to meet a lemon who would lead her to an oyster . . .

For that is another odd little twist which war has given to our manners nowadays. It was strangely "all right" for Leueen to make this excuse to break a previous engagement. Everybody would understand it: "Rude, of course not! She's got a *lemon*!"

A certain artificiality has been discarded, and the code nowadays has such a strong basis of sense and honesty that it is unlikely we shall ever abandon it. During a Wings for Victory week in London last March, a day which began with a mild air-raid at about 1 a.m., I had a sudden impulse to go with Kate Mary after lunch for a look at the Stirling on view in what had been St. Paul's Churchyard. She had come to bring me a tin of pimento in conscientious repayment of the pair of woollen stockings (whole and without darns) which I had given her when her doctor had suddenly ordered her off for a week's holiday to Scotland during the cold weather. Rashly she had promised me half her kingdom to help her out, but I, a perfect lady, had said a tin of pimento would be enough because I had never cared for those particular stockings—they scratched my legs. However, I had not expected the tin to be quite so small and was able to say so, politely, under the new code; and Kate agreed and said I should have another as soon as she could get it.

I was glad to be seeing St. Paul's, for the first time since the raids, in this exhilarating atmosphere of bands and crowds, bombers covered with savings stamps, flags fluttering, Wings for Victory . . . Otherwise it would have been a shock a thousand times worse than the sight of my own home gutted out with blackened walls and no roof. St. Paul's did not seem quite like St. Paul's with open fields and spaces surrounding it where once had been the little shops of Paternoster Row pressing filially close around, blocking out the view—too wide a view now, where we could hardly have crammed in even half a Stirling before. But one noticed on that special day the miracle of how the Cathedral had escaped, rather than the desolation of what had been destroyed. There was too much stir and sunshine in the air, for brooding. Though I still cannot quite understand how and why Kate departed afterwards with a bottle of liquid paraffin (unwrapped) which I gave her for my share of the taxi-fare home, saying earnestly and honestly: "I do, I *do* prefer it to Petrolagar—*anyone* will tell you! It's not a sacrifice *at all*." And the outing ended on that slightly crazy note, for she took the bottle, naked as it was, to hear a foreigner give a lecture on English literature which she had been specially begged to attend: "Nothing could encourage him more, you see, Madam, because of your uncle."

Perhaps I had better explain that Kate is a niece of Somerset Maugham, and therefore by tolerable reasoning might be supposed

to convey mystic powers of encouragement for a foreign lecturer on literature, even though he could not have divined that in addition she wrote on letter-paper headed OGNISKO POLISKIE (The Polish Hearth) where she had the job of presiding socially and maternally at our Allies' temporary home from home.

Most addresses, nowadays, have acquired a strangeness which may pass when war has passed and our friends return to live at Kenilworth or Cozy Nook or Kumfy Home, the Lodge or the Manor or the Laurels, or 11, High Street or 63, Lancaster Road; comfortable, commonplace, familiar addresses to us who live in England—(I could not help feeling when I went to Hollywood that the Garden of Eden, which is an hotel, or Amor House, Orchid Avenue, a block of apartments, were slightly above my station). Yet now when we are writing to our friends in the Services or on official jobs, and addressing envelopes to a long string of letters and numbers and then more letters and numbers, I could do with something that had a little more of the Rose Briars, if not of the orchidaceous touch; not yet having laid hold of that war-minded spirit of the soldier in a newspaper Crazy Cartoon, who said with a fatuous smile, clasping his best girl (in uniform) in cuddly fashion round the waist: "Another thing, Miss . . . I think 5767270 is *such* a pretty number."

I expect her pretty name behind her pretty number was Gladys. I may be self-conscious about my parents' choice of an unusual name for their little daughter, but it still seems to me, in spite of the modern spate of Joan and Pamela, Rosemary, Jill and Diana, and the even more modern vogue which will lead to all girls of to-morrow being hailed either as Jane or Ann, that Gladys is imperishable and turns up as often as ever.

However, my fantastic war-time post-bag consoled me, a year ago, by yielding up a complimentary letter from a little group of Sioux telling me that a name had been given to me in the Sioux language: WIYUKCANWIN, which means The Thinker (not Rodin's). In case I should not know how to pronounce this, always supposing that modesty permitted me to use it instead of Gladys, they added the key:

i as in police, u as in rule, c as in check  
a as in father (but in this case nazalized)  
æ indicates the n is not completed.

Furthermore, a coloured portrait was enclosed of myself, head

and shoulders, taken no doubt from an ordinary photograph in an American paper, but cleverly re-coiffed as an Indian squaw. They gave me an idea that according to squaw standard, I was not at all bad. But it was a slight shock to open the packet - casually with the usual "Who's this from, I wonder?" and be confronted with my own profile, solemn between two smooth plaits banded in blue and scarlet. It was brought to the cottage door in my Berkshire village by the postman, a baker who retired from baking because of illness, but found life too dull without his morning back-door chat. He could hardly have realized the strangeness contained in our war-time post-bag. We have had to readjust our old-world method of summing up what the envelopes are likely to contain by the look of them. For your most elegant friend who, in the past, would never use anything but the most aristocratic paper and big envelope with crest, etc., now writes to you in one of those oblong, cheap, yellowish "bills" sort, much bandaged, with "Gas Light and Coke Co." perhaps printed on it and crossed out or not crossed out, or "Local Sanitary Inspectors"; so that you get a pang of alarm before you recognize the writing. Every addressed envelope is now a palimpsest; you can distinguish behind the economy label the original name and address underneath, and perhaps even a third name and address scribbled underneath that. In one of those buried addresses you may be interested to recognize the writing of a mutual friend, and you speculate, before you open it, on why old So-and-so can possibly have been writing to old So-and-so (and why to him and not to me?). That long legal-looking envelope which used to announce a legacy in all the best old-fashioned fiction, now merely appears in your post-bag because the sender had himself received a letter from a previous sender who had had a letter from his mother who had heard from a lawyer who had started out with an envelope of his own.

Every envelope and every parcel which now reaches you, is primarily looked upon as a legitimate way of acquiring paper for use without buying it; and hailed with pleasure or disgust according to its condition; its contents are a secondary consideration. If you happen to be one of those people who have never amused themselves by slowly looking through your post on the outside, but who used to pounce and tear, that is a habit difficult to break; my secretary cured me of it by tactfully placing on the breakfast-table a small fruit-knife inscribed "Buffet de la Gare de Lyon",



inherited from a gently scrupulous old aunt who, I am afraid, developed kleptomania just this once, brought on by the sparkling Paris air. With this I delicately slit open each envelope leaving it fit for future use. Yet unlikely people still do use the best envelopes, and among these I found a letter from a cook replying to my advertisement for a temporary or permanent post, who in spite of her languidly elegant stationery, believed firmly in abbreviation; my secretary, reading aloud a sentence: "I have not had a perm for eighteen months now", did not quite grasp the idiom and made a puzzled comment: "Fancy telling you about her *hair*, in an application!" Tradesmen who still courteously enclose a slip with their bill, containing compliments, nothing more, should be indignantly reminded that compliments cannot be used again.

A friend whose writing on a parcel had always announced another of those costly and well-chosen presents in which she excelled, now carefully registers a twopenny packet of chocolate spared from her ration. Your letter of thanks is almost hysterically grateful. The bulging untidy parcel with "Asprey" or "Fortnum & Mason" on the label of the brown paper, yet has a homely, an un-Asprey, un-Fortnum-&-Mason look about it; instinct is right, for it contains a selection of disgraceful old garments, worn and stained, tattered and shapeless, which one of your household has hauled out of limbo and sent on to you, knowing that the clothes coupon question will have altered your former lordly point of view about these being "done for"!

Then you may receive one of those exciting parcels that occasionally arrive from abroad; from America, in my case. There is a special glamour about these parcels covered over with stamps and official labels and customs and censorship permissions and lists of contents . . . You have lucky dips inside, as though it were a bran-pie. Often the welcome little packets of tea or biscuits bear improbably familiar names of well-known English makers; they have long ago been exported from Piccadilly to California, and reach us again, homing pigeons, in our village in Berkshire. While we were pondering over one of these U.S.A. packets of tea with a picture of Tewkesbury Abbey on the cover, whether it would prove to be Indian or China, our cook interrupted with complete conviction: "*That's* not Indian or China; that's *English* tea! You can see it from the picture."

The labels on these U.S.A. parcels bestowed on them by the firms who make them up for export, show a pretty wistful

imagination: it was, I think, "Eton" that contained a small rubber hot-water bottle, a richer treasure now than anything to eat or wear or hang on the wall. "Sweet Tooth" not unnaturally revealed candies, and "Morale Builder Upper" a motley assortment of what makes a girl brave and good, clean, antiseptic, seductive and an example to others; in fact lipstick, toothpaste, face-tissues, soap, cleansing cream and a tooth-brush. Finally, an anonymous parcel arrived which Dido has since called: "Gift-Horse". The regulation list on the label informed us that we should presently be unpacking Tea, one pound, Orange Pekoe; Caramels, one box of; Lentils, one package of Lentils. Gradually my power of speech came back: "Lentils! Lentils to *me*! Lentils taking up space on the ship, all the way from America! Lentils! Oh no, *not* lentils! Dido, have you seen lentils one package of? Lentils, for lentil soup and Woolton pie! Stay me with lentils; need they stay with me? I could give them away, couldn't I? I mean there must be little boys and girls who'd be very glad of lentils one package of, coming all the way from America." By this time the parcel was opened. We pulled out four lovely stumpy fragrant packets of Orange Pekoe, a pleasant double-decker box of "Caramels" (the bottom layer, as so rarely happens, more delectable than the top) and a white paper package which had burst and strewn some of the contents on the bottom of the box. "I suppose those are the lentils?" I remarked, cutting them dead; "aren't they green!" "I don't mind taking them," Dido offered magnanimously; "they'll do for my underfed family; they're probably full of vitamins and I can disguise the taste in a sharp sauce." She picked one up carelessly and nibbled it, perhaps to find out why a lentil should be apple-green. Came the dawn: "Sugar! *Chocolate!* Ooh, Peter, try!" I tried. That underfed family of Dido's never got those apple-green *dragées*. Moral: You should always put a gift-horse in the mouth before you part with it.

They were so extra special that they very nearly shared the fate of everything extra special to eat or drink which had come into the house for weeks: "No, we won't have that or that or this, I want to save it for Lynn and Alfred" . . . And as it happened, the Lunts arrived the very next day and came to lunch the day after. But it did occur to me that perhaps it would be a little silly to produce American lentil *dragées* as a tribute and a votive offering to the Lunts from America. I was able by sheer luck to produce a cold game-pie instead. That lunch had a dream-like quality.

## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

Since the outbreak of war, Alfred and Lynn, sturdiest of anti-isolationists, most loyal patriots of both England and America in alliance against the Axis, had done an immeasurable amount of good fighting for the cause by their inspired performances in New York and all over the U.S.A. of Sherwood's play "There Shall Be No Night". Now at last they were here where they had so much wanted to be. No one is able to explain that intangible quality in certain people, that personal magic, which makes us want to save all our apple-green lentils for the Lunts. Anyhow, I was telling them of the incident as we strolled along the Rope-Walk towards Piccadilly—and interrupted myself at the formal garden to show them Albany's Little Wanton Boy as a tiny instance of bomb damage: "Look," I said, opening the iron gate, "he's dancing!"—Then I stopped. He was not dancing any more. The broken-off leg flung up so gaily from the half-broken arm—what had happened? Both limbs were now lying on the pedestal and his fun was over. But Lynn declared with one of the quick happy inspirations which are her characteristic gift to life, that he probably wanted them to be used for the war effort: "He knew his bow and arrow wouldn't be much use. So he's offering lead bullets to defend Albany if they come over again."

A parcel received when raids were heaviest and mails had to make their way through dislocation and violence, gave my secretary a bad nervous shock: one end had broken open, and as she picked it up, a large fish's head, chilly and lifeless, came lolling out from its bed of greenery and flopped into her hand. A friend on leave had remembered how I had always been addicted to salmon-trout fresh from a Scottish stream.

I am reminded, opening parcels, of the sweet old lady who on hearing that Finland had joined Germany in the war exclaimed in high distress: "Oh dear, I *hope* the parcel I sent to Finland will arrive safely!—or perhaps I oughtn't to hope so now?" Bewildered but accommodating, she held hope in abeyance ready to put it wherever patriotism might need it most.

Airgraph letters appear in your post-bag, as This War's Novelty. Apart from the pleasure of hearing by such means from the soldier abroad, they have about them, these airgraph letters, all the delicate finished perfection that used to delight one so as a child, when given something grown-up in miniature or toy form: a shop or a set of cooking-pans.

I remember wondering whether that famous letter that Hitler

wrote to Maréchal Pétain on the morning of November 27th, 1942, blowing him sky-high, was an airgraph or one of those things with perforated edges that you tear off with trembling fingers: "Only one letter, Maréchal," when they brought in his post. "Only one?" disappointed; "who's it from?" "I think," very cautiously, "from the writing, I mean, I *think* it's from Herr Hitler." A wail from Pétain: "Oh, what a *horrid* post! Are you sure there's nothing else at all? Not even a postcard? Then need I open it? It's sure to upset me. *You* open it for me and tell me if it's anything he hasn't said before. Oh dear, and there won't be another post till four this afternoon."

The best of all far-off letters to reach me while I still lived at Ruston Cophthall—and by "best" I suppose I must mean in most provocative contrast with the setting where I opened it, was addressed from the Pacific Biological Station, Departure Bay, Nanaimo, British Columbia; and the contents were equally effective in contrast with a world at war; for my unknown reader, after a few tributes which I lapped up for future nourishment during those periods when I would surely feel that writing was "no good", went on to reproach me courteously for an error I had made in "Another Part of the Forest":

Your reference to the plant called "Dane's Blood". Several plants are so called in England on the strength of the same fable. The particular one to which your definition applies is the European "Pasque Flower" (*Pulsatilla pulsatilla*—which is the only way to refer to it so that your meaning may be quite unambiguous, and is it not just as tuneful as the other?). It blooms in early Spring (Hence "Pasque"—Easter—cf. Pascall Lamb). There is a North American "Pasque Flower" which grows all over the prairies and is known as the "Prairie Crocus"—again association with early Spring. Will you allow me a little carping criticism if I suggest that, should you ever write your little story based on the Dane's Blood legend, you make the flower involved something other than an iris because there is only one iris native to England on which a Dane *could* have bled and that (the water iris—*Iris pseudacorus*) is so common that its distribution would indicate a very improbably widespread slaughter of Danes. Why not stick to the Anemone or, if you prefer them, there is an elder and also a campanula to which the name "Dane's Blood" has been popularly applied.

I am led to doubt the legend we all learnt at school about the Ancient Britons dyeing themselves blue with woad; Julius Caesar notwithstanding. I grew quite a crop of woad last Summer and

succeeded in dyeing a lot of wool with it, but not myself, though I am both ancient and British. There are ways in which it might conceivably have been done, but they are all rather improbable.

Is it not amazing how, at any rate in this country, blue has become so closely associated with grief (Blue devils; I've got the blues; Kentucky blues, etc.) that it is looked upon as the colour emblematical of sorrow despite the Virgin Mary's frocks, the blue vault of heaven and what not? I heard a lad given a bad mark in a quiz recently because he suggested black, rather than blue, as the sorrowful hue.

You probably knew my maternal uncle "Arthur Collins of Drury Lane" . . . Certainly you spent some of your youth in Holland Park and I mine in Holland Road. These things may perhaps serve as an introduction.

"These things" will always and always serve as an introduction.

I wonder if I was right in setting down "contrast" as the very essence of strangeness? War has given us some fantastic twists and knots in the familiar cord which used to string our days together. I remember an occasion in December, 1940, when we had to ring up Lord's Cricket Ground to get a Jewess (our aunt) properly buried at Willesden. That seemed illogical beyond my explaining, though I suppose the raids had something to do with it. I also remember much later, after the American Expeditionary Force had first come to England, going to see a glamorous young actress who had no cook and five small children besides one of her own living with her for safety in a quiet house of English fairy-tale; it stood lonely in a clearing surrounded by tall smooth silver-green tree-trunks, in Buckinghamshire; how strange not merely to learn from a bridle-path signpost that this beech-leaf road through the woods should be called Roosevelt Road, but that it should seem by then perfectly natural.

The strangeness of war in small things at home, when any random day looks like a page from Lewis Carroll collaborating with an Algebra book of unknown quantities! I have seen splashed on a cinema poster, in all goodwill and naïveté: Huge Bank Holiday Attraction: One of our Aircraft is Missing! Nowadays a crashing thunderstorm on a scale which used to terrify a good many people out of their wits, is received with genuine relief and the remark: "Oh, it's all right, it's *only* a thunderstorm!" . . . implying that it was hardly worth trying to darken the sky for

just that poor little effect; and indeed, compared with the reality of an air-raid, it sounds no more than a timid and not very expensive stage imitation. After the autumn of 1940, we really cannot get under the table any more for a silly thunderstorm.

In May, 1942, I had to do a short broadcast to "India, Burma, South Africa and the Far East" (so I was told—and looked forward to receiving my Japanese fan-mail after about six months). They escorted me down passages bristling with fixed bayonets and ringing with challenges to my identity, till we were far enough underground to go on the air; and they informed me, an aside to the business of the moment, that this was where one of our largest firms of Linen-Drapers used to stock its surplus hosiery . . .

Hosiery has become a rueful subject, a subject not for remembrance, but for Ophelia's madness: Oh, you must wear your hose with a difference! And how easily we have formed that habit of mind which leads us nowadays to say: "How many coupons?" instead of "How much?"—and a burst of really quite reasonable resentment when we are required to part with money as well as with coupons . . . as though one had not paid enough! And the strange things that nowadays in terms of war-time assurance, constitute *good news*: "Good news this morning!"—Oh God, the dreadful things that (can we help it?) now count as good news! Our bombing of the Eder and Moehne dams . . . destruction and devastation and anguish . . . people killed . . . yet should we not be pedantic if we remembered to say each time: "Good-but-grim news this morning"? And still letting spontaneity have its way, the queer things that get themselves tacked on to the phrase: "I'm glad to say—" "I'm glad to say I'm over sixty; I'm glad to say my husband has chronic asthma and a duodenal ulcer"—and then always the hasty, ashamed correction: "At least, not *glad*, of course, but—"

It is alleged by a lawyer I know, that a handful of most respectable ladies had been filling in their calling-up papers with "prostitute" as their profession, for thus they were not eligible. It would be a little difficult, however, to conduct a seemingly scientific investigation as to the truth of this, before adding it to my collection of Strangeness Nowadays; a bona fide prostitute might be offended if one said: "Please, all I want to know is . . ." But at the other end of the enquiry, the Labour Exchange might also be haughty if you walked in and took up their time asking if this report were true or an idle rumour?

When publishers nowadays are able unexpectedly to print another small impression of one's new book, after the dreadful allusions to their restricted assignment of paper, what a queer idiom they use for their cheerful tidings: "Look here," they exclaim, "we've actually found a bit of extra paper"—*found it, scrounged it, stumbled on it* . . . indicating a back cupboard or a cellar, and some sudden rather painful physical encounter with the paper. Moreover, to all concerned in the book trade: authors, publishers, booksellers, printers, how ironically topsy-turvy, after years of longing for a boom and big book sales, that the boom should be here and the unbelievable cry: "We want books, give us books, give us more and more books, we can never have enough books, bring out your books!"—and we count ourselves lucky if we can provide a few, a sparse trickle; supply and demand of one to a hundred; and again know ourselves lucky in at least having freedom to write and lacking only paper to print.

One forgets sometimes, and remembers again at dead of night, that sleepy little seaside hotel with a sentry-box directly below one's bedroom window, where the path winds up to a gun-emplacement on the headland. When a weathered soldier was on duty, I could only hear a bored murmur of voices if somebody tried to walk past; but when it was a raw zealous young recruit, came a tremendous clatter of musketry and a ringing: "Halt! Who goes there?" loud enough to wake the dead. And away from the sea, inland on the river bank, how often recently have we all seen that little House in the Woods, straight out of Act I in an old-fashioned English pantomime, an Arthur Collins pantomime at Drury Lane, built of cardboard and draped in a net of leaves tacked over it, and a pleasant approach of tree-trunks and logs; and while you wait for the Woodcutter or Cinderella or Hansel and Gretel, you become aware that nowadays this alluring but childish little "property" house is—

—But *Punch's* Summer Number for 1943 supplied me with the perfect name. Two little hikers trotting up to the door, hoping for a nice 1/6d. tea (watercress, strawberry jam and currant cake)—Then the roof burst open, grinning soldiers looking out from behind a row of bristling guns . . . Shall I ever be able to call a camouflage cottage by any other name than "Lorna's Bower"?

So we have looped round and back again to the River. At the beginning of the last chapter, I was remembering it in the

Edwardian period when I was a restless, discontented girl of seventeen. Now I am seeing it again with bombers roaring overhead, and a gun-emplacement skilfully disguised a few yards away from where I am letting my punt drift quietly downstream between banks of willowherb and meadowsweet (strangeness reversed, to see willowherb where it belongs, instead of pushing up in unpremeditated wild gardens in the ruined courtyard of Mayfair).

I call our Thames "the River" as though there were only one in the world; and it is true that rivers have a way of winding in and out of our daily lives, a normal intimate accompaniment. We love the sea more—at least, I do—but we see it less; for most of us, unless actually living on the very edge of land or perpetually travelling from one continent to another, the sea has been a heaven splendidly isolated to a visit once a year. We thirst for the sea, and sometimes we go to the sea. The River, our River, cannot compete, for it hardly ever wakens that very passion of longing. Perhaps we do not consciously notice it; yet how unhappily we should notice a country without rivers. Rivers can follow us, however deeply inland, bringing their water and their music and their freshness; the sea must remain behind. The sea is dramatic; the river—except for rare floods—peaceful and quiet and kind. The river gods and presences and population are kind in every language, except the German Lorelei and those confusing Rhinegold people. The Romans used to pray to Father Tiber to protect them, and Milton brings us Sabrina rising from the Severn to rescue the Lady of his Masque. In the Cotswolds a little river almost lured me by its name to buy a certain house so that I might have the Windrush running at the foot of my garden. In Russia, the great rivers of which once we knew so little except by the geography-book and by Chaliapin, now have a history of glory and blood thundering down with each river name, mighty extensions of that tiny river (was it in Austria?) where once a battle was fought which for English children turned into a recitation, mysterious in its significance but easy to learn because of the continual "Iser, rolling rapidly". The Danube first became familiar to us by a waltz; and the vast Mississippi by a song sung in Paul Robeson's Burgundy-velvet voice:

"I'm tired of livin' and feared of dyin',  
But Old Man River, that Old Man River,  
He just keeps rollin' along."



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

Yes, even the Mississippi can be domesticated and accosted as an everyday friend helpful to sad negroes, like the Swanee River and the other rivers of their homesick spirit, till spirit leads us to Spiritual, and carries us away to Jordan . . . and so away from the little Windrush and all the brooks and streams and Scottish burns that burble past our own home windows, that run at the foot of the lawn at the end of the garden, tinkling and murmuring; tumbling over rocks, over horseshoe weirs, narrowing to deep waterfalls. Yet always in any land and continent the shining curve of a river, reduced to a scale of friendship and homeliness, can be a symbol of that River "in the midst of the street" . . . not hard and brilliant as jasper and gold and glass and every one of the twelve gates a pearl, but "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal"—lovely reassurance of Heaven by a symbol of what we have already learnt to know and do not fear.

## CHAPTER IX

### UNSOLICITED GIFT

WHEN Christian crossed the river at the end of his Pilgrimage, we are told that all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side. Impossible to read that phrase and not instantly hear the music that the trumpets were playing; not music in a vague general sense, but music which is the symbol of Life.

As far as I am concerned, they can only be sounding Purcell's Trumpet Voluntary.

Nor is this the moment to argue whether the composer of that voluntary was indeed Purcell; recent investigations have assigned it to Jeremiah Clark. Without argument, still let me go on calling him Purcell, for by that beautiful name, with its cadence so purely English, I first heard of it; Clark has a too industrious note, and Jeremiah an undertug of woe.

By the same ingenuous ignorance by which I convulsed my friends, when I was already in my thirties, by an enthusiastic discovery (on a tour abroad) of a "painter called Breughel", I discovered a "musician called Purcell" when I was fifty. Which seems a little late.

It was literally a revelation from the Book of Revelations when

I heard the Trumpet Voluntary. We all surprise ourselves at times, oftener perhaps than we realize, by suddenly becoming aware that we have been moving all day to the lilt of a tune inside our heads; a mere snatch of a tune, a phrase repeated again and again for no apparent reason except that it started and we cannot be rid of it until it chooses to depart of its own accord. If in the same way we could become conscious of the clear tune of life itself, its triumph and its certainty, uniting defiance of death with a welcome from the other side, that tune might well be the Trumpet Voluntary.

A voluntary in its musical definition means freedom from set rules. The organist is supposed to extemporize when he is playing a voluntary before or after a service in church. And voluntary, even when we are not speaking of music, remains a word still carrying at its happiest the suggestion of life's freedom as an unsolicited gift, removing all shadow of a supreme dictatorship once the gift has been bestowed. Running beneath the joyful notes of Purcell's Trumpet Voluntary I can hear the celebration, the forward impetus, the vitality, the elixir, and at last . . . "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal".

Naturally I cannot mean that I have only to put a record on a gramophone and all this instantly and mechanically happens to my soul. Only very rarely do we hear, even in music, the trumpets that sound from the other side. Mostly we say, in varying degrees of enthusiasm: "That's a nice tune." Much too rarely, dragging along the difficult hours and years, limping through the obstacle race, do we hear life and know it and trust it. By music is the swiftest road, but it can likewise gleam from a picture, or be flung out in alabaster, or express itself in the upward rush of a cat climbing a tree. I am not trying to speak of beauty at the moment, or glamour, or love; only of being alive, the spark and primary cause. It is a rapture contained in all Van Gogh's paintings; his cornfields crackle with it; "Vincent's Chair", plain rushwood seat and sturdy back, is the essence of life, by what the chairmaker and painter put into it; a chair compassionately meant to receive a tired body at the end of the day. Not long ago Epstein did a huge carving of his conception of Jacob and the Angel, in rosy marble. On first going into the room where it was exhibited I exclaimed quickly: "Oh, no!"—but then I moved round and saw it at another angle from the side where, in a good moment (good, that is, for me, for I hardly suppose the sculptor cared

whether we shared his vision or not) I recognized the mysterious reassurance in the clasp of the angel's arms round the fainting man who had been fighting him all night. And in that recognition was again the unsolicited gift which had pealed through the trumpets. There was life and greatness in this work; life to us who saw it. He had thrust it right through the marble so that we might understand how the angel, though he had to wrestle with man, had simultaneously the strength and the noble immunity from anger, to hold man when he failed. And the curve and support of his arms were like a benison.

As a complete amateur in art I was compelled to ask, as did nearly everyone else visiting the Exhibition: "But why did he make their legs so short?" To ask it rather crossly, never doubting but that Epstein had a reason which I had missed. I would have been a fool not to see why (except for the unearthly power in those arms) he had allowed no physical difference to appear between Jacob and the Angel; for Jacob must not be allowed to know from the start that he was fighting a losing fight. But again—why those short legs that looked misshapen when you first entered and approached the group from the back? Without any doubt at all, he had his reason for that; yet was it not his business to make me feel what it was? A message must be told or it remains selfish, not living and fertile. The main message had been delivered; he might have relented and let the rest come through.

And away from art in all its forms, the same celebration of life pushes through the business of living, reminding us when and where we are least awaiting it, of the theme and the justification; especially now during these war years when death is so toweringly in evidence: the River Styx against the River of Light, smothering the babble of all the little rivers that run through our days.

Last year I happened to be standing with a friend on the lawn of a garden by the Thames, watching how a cat played with its kitten in the sun; chocolate-box—but no amount of chocolate-box could ever retain the irresistible life and movement in a cat which only exists for us during our moment of watching it; no amount of chocolate-box can save us from that sudden catch in the breath: "Look, it isn't true! Look!" . . . And then Esmond Knight came across the lawn and joined us, led by his wife, for he had been blinded on the *Prince of Wales* during the *Bismarck* action. She exclaimed impulsively, seeing what we saw: "Aren't they adorable!" And he, the sailor, asked quickly "What? What

is?" For he was magnificently refusing to drop back acquiescent into the shadows. I replied: "Oh, just a cat playing with its kitten." No other way to describe that phenomenon of life and spirit which happened then, than by the cliché "his face lit up" . . . "How enchanting!" he exclaimed, not in a voice of flat mechanical effort to respond, but happily, spontaneously rejoicing in the life going on there in front of him on the grass; going on careless of whether he could see it or not. It struck me with a genuine thrill, that here in this small incident was such a triumphant manifestation of success that it could well have been announced by a winding of horns. Specifically, I should celebrate it with the phrase which comes within three or four minutes of the end of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

Professional musicians dislike it intensely when a professional writer tries to interpret into words their impression of any piece of musical composition. If they could, I believe they would forbid it by law. Nevertheless, I will brave their wrath by referring to a description in E. M. Forster's "Howard's End". I read the book before I consciously heard the Fifth Symphony, and it is true that it influenced me to listen in a certain way for certain effects: "It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come—of course, not so as to disturb the others—or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood; or like Margaret, who can see only the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fräulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is 'echt Deutsch'; or like Fräulein Mosebach's young man who can remember nothing but Fräulein Mosebach; in any case the passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings. It is cheap, even if you hear it in the Queen's Hall, dreariest music-room in London."

(And how much of our outlook has completely changed even during the brief passage of years since this was published in 1910. The first statement is a matter for argument at any period; is there not a Third, a Seventh, a Ninth Symphony by Beethoven? The contention by Fräulein Mosebach that Beethoven is "echt Deutsch" has been proved wrong by two wars with Germany,

during which our passion to hear Beethoven, far from subsiding, has risen in great floods. "Echt Deutsch" can be best translated as "German all over", a translation not without humour when one listens to the code signal of the daily broadcast to the occupied countries. Shucks to Fräulein Mosebach! "Cheap at two shillings" . . . comment is unnecessary. And as for the Queen's Hall being the "dreariest music-room in London", well, it may have been, but some of us since the Blitz of 1940-1941 avoid passing down Langham Place because nostalgia cannot bear to see the blackened shell of what now shines in retrospect as the most glorious concert-hall in London.)

" . . . The music started with a goblin walking quietly over the universe from end to end. Others followed him. They were not aggressive creatures; it was that that made them so terrible to Helen. They merely observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world. After the interlude of elephants dancing, they returned and made the observation for the second time . . . Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right.

" . . . For, as if things were going too far, Beethoven took hold of the goblins and made them do what he wanted. He appeared in person. He gave them a little push, and they began to walk in major key instead of in a minor, and then—he blew with his mouth and they were scattered! Gusts of splendour, gods and demi-gods contending with vast swords, colour and fragrance broadcast on the field of battle, magnificent glory, magnificent death!

" . . . And the goblins—they had not really been there at all! They were only the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief? One healthy human impulse would dispel them? Men like the Wilcoxes and President Roosevelt would say yes. Beethoven knew better. The goblins really had been there. They might return—and they did. It was as if the splendour of life might boil over and waste to steam and froth. In its dissolution one heard the terrible, ominous note, and a goblin, with increased malignity, walked quietly over the universe from end to end. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! Even the flaming ramparts of the world might fall.

Beethoven chose to make it all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for a second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and,

amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely, and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things."

An unknown reader mentioned in a letter I received recently, that she too had read the book first and heard the symphony afterwards, but that she could not hear a single goblin. I personally recognized the goblins, but what Forster called "gusts of splendour, gods and demi-gods contending with vast swords . . ." I in my mind called "battlements", just as in the slow movement of the Seventh, I always saw a vast staircase and heard footsteps marching up, of an unseen army. There is a certain strain in the third movement of the Ninth Symphony which I always call "heartbreak". I suppose professional musicians, if they should chance to read this, will by now be sick as mud; but I refuse to submit. Let them, if they wish, keep music pure and unviolated from drama; they cannot control our reactions. And they are glad enough to seize hold of a legend or story (brought to them in words, mind you) and tell us what it signifies to them in music. In E. C. Bentley's detective book "Trent's Last Case", he speaks of the famous motif in the finale of the Choral Symphony, as what we are likely to hear when the gates of heaven are rolled back and celestial music comes through. But that is an individual choice, and there will be numerous candidates. Readers of Aldous Huxley will remember how Spandrell chose to kill himself to the strains of Beethoven's Quartette in A minor; and that too is a matter for individual waywardness. Returning to the Trumpet Voluntary, Ronald Fraser wrote a novel called "Financial Times" where the principal character, Titus, finds his soul during a so-called original composition by his young brother, but it concluded with the trumpets sounding from the other side, and I think he must really have meant the Trumpet Voluntary expressing life positive not static; life going into action.

A weekly feature in the B.B.C. programmes, popular for some time, was a choice by interesting, not necessarily eminent people, of the eight gramophone records which they would choose if they were thrown up for life on a desert island; presumably a gramophone was to be thrown up with them on the raft, otherwise the discs might seem tantalizing and not even good to eat. I am sulking a little that I was never asked to contribute, though like everybody listening in, I immediately assembled my own eight

records. And here they are with my reasons attached, for there are more considerations than merely love of this or that; desert island environment must argue a somewhat unusual state of mind and far more responsibility placed on each precious piece of music than if you could simply go round the corner and buy another when you felt capricious or your mood changed. And then when the mind dwells lovingly on a symphony, you are checked by that maddening rule that eight is eight and not twenty-eight or thirty-seven, and that one record means just one record and not both sides of the six or seven records that make up a symphony; must I therefore go without Beethoven's Third or Sixth or Seventh or Ninth or the late quartettes because of this pedantic fussiness? Obviously I must. And as I care for them most of all, and especially for the Seventh, I must put terrific control on my temper and go on repeating firmly like a Coué abracadabra: "I am austere, I am not self-indulgent", *da capo al fine*.

I will have, therefore, a record of as-much-as-I-may of the slow movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, and another of as-much-as-I-may of the third movement of the Ninth Symphony. And if by any possible cheating, however low and dirty, I can manage to slip in the whole of the Seventh and the whole of the Ninth I will go to a B.B.C. Hell for it and welcome. Naturally I want Purcell's (yes, Purcell's) Trumpet Voluntary to help me wish to go on living when the spark is almost quenched by despair, and that distant sail fades again on the horizon without noticing me jumping up and down on the shore waving my shirt, sick to death of blue seas, brazen sky and turtles' eggs. And by the way, returning to Beethoven, it should be arranged for the symphony orchestra on those records to be conducted by Toscanini.

Bach's Chorale: "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring"; and Tschai-kowsky's Andante Cantabile in D, opus 11. The quintette from Wagner's "Meistersinger", including Schumann and Melchior among the singers. Grieg's Concerto—no, I mean a record from Grieg's Concerto for pianoforte and orchestra, opus 16, quite simply to be played by the greatest pianist who has made a recording. And Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D Major, which Samuel Butler so despised, and which in a queer sort of way sings to me more clearly and directly than any other music in the world. The simple melody takes a lark-flight straight up from the complication of the cadenza towards the end of the first movement, and that is the record I would choose.

So far, I have been wholly sure of my selection. Now it begins to be difficult. So far, they have all been what is so curiously named classical. I have already described in another volume how I had not cared for any music until I was over thirty. I cannot explain this, unless by the suggestion that I hated my piano-lessons and my practising, which went on much too persistently for someone with no talent; I was taught by one of the well-known Chaplin trio who had too much fire and talent to be patient with my painful fumbling, and an unenjoyable time was had by both. And then I had no "ear". I still have no "ear", which is to say that inside my mind I can hear the correct notes, but when I try to bring them out, when I sing, the pained expressions on the faces of my musical friends, or what is worse, their laughter, cause me to look on musical territory as a dangerous Tom Tiddler's Ground where others might pick up gold and silver, but not I.

I am glad that I can definitely divide the music that I still do not like, from the music that I now love, as this reassures me that my late awakening has at least form and personality, and is not just a vague wash of sentiment embracing all pleasant sound. For the music I do not like (much) is as good, meaning as "classical", as the music I prefer. To sum up: my list is led by Beethoven, then Bach, then (here it begins to be a bit funny) Grieg, then (here it rights itself again) Schubert (except the Unfinished), then Mozart (but not the operas, which are too pointed and soprano and coloratura, like Italian handwriting), some Brahms and some Tschaikowsky (my musical education does not let me say which "some" until I am hearing it), about two-thirds of Debussy, especially "*La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*"; Stravinsky's "*Fire Bird*" and "*Sacre du Printemps*"; some of Elgar (in fact, most of Elgar); Arnold Bax's "*Tintagel*" which can move very far up the list; Strauss's "*Rosenkavalier*" (my favourite opera; I heard it at the Vienna Opera-house with Lehmann, Schumann and Jeritza, which is the same as saying I heard it perfectly sung). Opera plays a very small part in this belated need for music in my life; compared with the joy I receive from orchestral and chamber music, it need hardly exist. Before I heard "*Rosenkavalier*", my favourite opera was "*Louise*"; and, for love of Paris, I would include a record of the beginning of the second act where the rag and bone men, the sweepers, the midinettes and all the rest of the dawn procession hurry or loiter through the streets, and we hear



that nostalgic Paris motif. Earlier still, my very juvenile preference rested on a good pull-up for "Carmen".

No Chopin; nor Schumann; nor Liszt. And no Italians. But I must put into the pool, partly to keep myself out of too much trouble and partly to know where to find them, the names of a few composers whose music I have certainly heard and enjoyed though not at the moment aware who was my host: Rimsky-Korsakov, Ravel, Haydn, Sibelius and Handel. If I include a record of the opening theme of the Handel Violin Sonata in A, it must be played, naturally, by Menuhin. Kreisler at his best will play my fragment of the Beethoven Violin Concerto.

Does this amount to eight records? If not, I must slip in one or two, not classical but intimate, where I know the voices well and can think of London, Paris, Vienna and New York whenever I put them on during my island sojourn, and dive, sobbing, far down into the coral-reef Waiferage. Yvonne Printemps singing "Au Clair de la Lune", "Plaisir d'Amour", or Mozart's Letter Song; Noel in almost any of his own lighter songs: "Mad Dogs and Englishmen", "Any Little Fish", "A Room with a View", "London Pride", or "Don't let's be Beastly to the Germans"; Gertie, linked with memories of Noel again, doing "Some Day I'll Find You", "Parisian Pierrot", or "Mad about the Boy"; Paul singing "Water Boy" . . .

While Dido was taking down this chapter, I noticed her being first restive, then nervous, then scared, then inarticulate, then finally much too articulate. I watched this crescendo in the agreeable knowledge that presently I should be losing my temper in a big way; it would be a nice change for both of us, and, being on an impersonal subject, leave neither a penny the worse.

Then it came out: apparently there was something badly "wrong" with my selection of records and my confession of preferences and indifferences. "All right," I said, "there it is. I'm not 'musical'; meaning that I've resisted music till after I was thirsty—thirty, I mean. What happened to me then has been entirely spontaneous and accidental. From that point of view"—(I expect she was interrupting me all this time but I took no notice, having that to say which must be said)—"from that point of view, I think my list is fairly respectable; at any rate, not too blatantly awful; it's a bit eccentric, and it may have a few funny gaps and side-slips, but *you're* trying to tell me it's pathological!"

She replied, as she clung with sliding finger-tips on the crumpling edge of politeness: "I can't help it, it's dicky; how can you possibly sit there and . . ."

"Dicky." A flaw somewhere, like the flaw in the substratum under Los Angeles which caused the earthquake at the end of March, 1933, the earthquake which found me delicately stepping into my bath at Santa Monica; the tremors and shivers afterwards ("temblors" is their technical name) went on for eleven days. Now I confronted Dido, myself potential with an eleven-day temblor: "Give me an instance of what's dicky: *Where* have I been dicky? I've been talking about music as it strikes me, as I react to it; I've owned that I'm ignorant and haven't the smallest authority where music's concerned; that's different. But where is it dicky?"—(the word that got my goat).

Out of the hurly-burly I gathered some of the things that had chiefly shocked her; one or two were legitimate: that I should have given "a good second-rater", as she called Grieg, precedence over composers the size of Schubert and Mozart; and included none of Mozart in my records; and dismissed the compositions of Schumann and the piano music of Chopin "just like that".

A lull in the battle while I admitted that this was kind of funny (funny, not dicky); but that though while I listened to Mozart, I let his music flow over me with the utmost pleasure, I could not appreciate keenly enough what I preferred in him, to the rest of him; all of it was lovely as far as I was concerned, except, as I have said, the operas; but I could not produce one separate record of which I might say: "*This* goes with me to the desert island; not that and that and that, but *this*"—as I can over Grieg. I called upon a useful ally in Robert Graves's poem, feeling quite sorry that Dido, though a pedant, was not also one of those hands-off-music-in-literature people, for it would have now lent further substance and breadth, to say nothing of length, to our clash:

. . . Mozart

Had snatched me up fainting and wild at heart  
To a green land of wonder, where estranged  
I dipped my feet in shallow brooks, I ranged  
Rough mountains and fields yellow with small vetch:  
Of which, though long I tried, I could not fetch  
One single flower away, nor from the ground  
Pocket one pebble of the scores I found  
Twinkling enchanted there . . .

"Dear Robert. All right," said Dido kindly, meaning: let it pass; I accept it.

But by now I wanted that fight, that earthquake: "Go on, what else?"

"Dickering with symphonies and concertos: one bit from this, one bit from that, a sort of glorified opera gems. How you *could* . . ."

"My God, I've said that I wanted the whole symphony! Of course I wanted the whole Seventh or Ninth. How could anyone be such a fool as to choose one record of it if they *could* have the whole? But we're not *allowed* to. Can you say that you'd rather have none at all than one glorious fragment?"

"Yes" . . . with the modest hesitation of all those arrogant in their fastidiousness. "Yes, I think I would almost certainly choose something that fitted into one record."

Then my wrath crashed: "I'm not playing this game mechanically. I've used my imagination. Here's the desert island where I'm cut off for ever from hearing symphonies I crave to hear. Obviously I'd not have broken up a symphony if I'd been buying records while living in London or the country; if I couldn't have the whole thing then, I'd still be fairly sure of a chance to hear it some time; but on this damn desert island you can't still keep up your exclusive high-brow affectation that it must be all or nothing, like Ibsen's Brand (and he was one of the most frightful men to have about, but luckily I don't have to). By the rules of this game, and I was playing honestly—"

"That's just it," interrupted Dido; "anyone of your intelligence had no business at all to be playing this game—"

I subsided into what I hoped was a dangerous calm: "But only not over music? I may play it with books or pictures:<sup>1</sup> That's all right?"

"Yes," Dido assented cordially, headlong into the pit I had dug for her; "that's *quite* all right."

So books and pictures were "all right": That mysterious "all right" of the elect. But what justification have they to keep the rest of us from violating music's exclusive territory? From storming the Promised Land:

<sup>1</sup> I had better explain, otherwise the quarrel becomes incoherent to the reader, that we had already done the next chapter, Palm Grove Galleries, which treats of the choice of my eight desert island pictures. For reasons of construction, we discovered that the sequence of these two chapters had to be reversed; but Palm Grove Galleries had been achieved in the sweetest accord, without a ripple of dissension.

"It's people like *you*," and I'm glad to say I was off again and really in a temper, "who keep the rest of us out of music by holding it as something extra sacred, much more sacred than books and poetry and painting. We mayn't come anywhere near music unless we know *all* about it, unless we're fit to be admitted without our shoes into the holy of holies; otherwise we jar, we dicker, we oughtn't to mention it at all, and really, it would be much better if we kept right away and listened to the street band! Wouldn't it? You all wince so easily, you're all so hypersensitive, you'd rather the people who love music but aren't completely educated in music, the novitiate, you'd rather we stayed outside in the crowd, having to listen to swing and Wurlitzers, than admit us to the fellowship of good music, classical music, *your* music—just in case we should make you suffer by making one or two mistakes."

"But look at what some of the novitiate *do* when they get hold of good music. They lay their ignorant, money-grubbing paws on it, they swing Tschaikowsky and tack on nauseating lyrics, they pot Beethoven, they scramble Schubert and Chopin and dish them up to the musical comedy public, garnished to taste—that's the way they treat Good Music."

"Only a few; you can't help it; you must risk that. Better than shielding music in the curve of your palm so that it shouldn't die in a draught. Music's for everyone, an open gift to the world, an unsolicited gift, so how dare you prevent those who love it with less discrimination from coming along and scooping up as much as they can carry away—I'm mixing my metaphors, but you know what I mean—any more than you would prevent a masterpiece being hung in a picture-gallery where anyone can come along and poke it with an umbrella—they're not taken away at the entrance any more—and cry: 'Oo, she's standing on a shell,' instead of a reverential hush and not even saying Botticelli because of course everyone who doesn't know it's a Botticelli has no right to be looking at it at all—"

"But your desert island pictures were complete; not a segment of the canvas. After all, you wouldn't just have an arm or a leg."

"Wouldn't you? Surely collectors collect treasured sketches for a big picture, segments and corners of it? I chose the Da Vinci St. Anne parted from the rest of the picture—because she was the only one who knew what was going to happen; you could see it in the way she looked at Them; it wasn't a smile, it wasn't irony, nor sadness, but all three. . . . She *knew*, and she knew she

couldn't stop it. And as for arms and legs," triumphantly scoring, "in my Albany rooms that were burnt, so you never saw it, I had a *perfect* leg, Duncan Grant's—Don't interrupt again!—From one of his friezes; I couldn't buy the whole frieze, so I bought that. Such *life*, you could visualize the whole figure it was part of!"

"Anyhow, the eight you *chose* (or was it twenty-eight?) except for St. Anne, were complete pictures. We never heard anything about sketches and fragments then."

"No, of course we didn't, because I was allowed to have the whole picture; but I'm not allowed the whole symphony."

"Who didn't allow you?"

"The B.B.C."

"That's the most pathological reason of all. As if *you* would allow a little thing like that to interfere."

"I was playing honestly," I plugged. "You *have* to play games honestly" (becoming public school) "or there's no sense in playing them at all. There's no sense in playing this one anyway," I added, anticipating her next remark.

"There isn't," she agreed, "but if I'd been playing it, and heaven forbid that I ever should, if I hadn't managed to find eight separate short records, I'd have used my whole eight for one complete symphony or concerto."

"And you'd have gone mad on your island," I retorted with much satisfaction. "Lots of musical purists do!—Is that true, by the way?" lapsing into friendship.

"I wouldn't put it past them," amicably.

For as we become more easily furious over sound than over what meets the eye, taste, smell, touch, so we can more easily become insane, or at all events a borderline case, over noise (the word for ugly sound) than over a repulsive sight, a bad smell, an unpleasant taste or a jarring contact. There are various ways of dividing the people of the world so that they fall into halves; the sheep and the goats; on the side of the angels and on the side of the devil. Kipling sorts us into the sons of Martha and the sons of Mary:

The Sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part;  
But the Sons of Martha favour their Mother of the careful soul and the  
troubled heart,

And because she lost her temper once, and because she was rude to the  
Lord, her guest,

Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons, world without end, reprieve or rest.

Another angle from which to let the dividing knife fall, may well be between the curious and the incurious. The curious must not be taken, in this sense, to mean the inquisitive. The curious are really those who are alive and constantly renewing wonder, and the incurious are those who accept what comes along without question or gratitude, and they might as well be dead. But the curious remain alive till the moment of death, and for all we know, for ever afterwards.

Sometimes I should divide the world into those who like noise and those who love quiet.

It would seem rational that law and order, government and public opinion as well as sympathy, should be fastened on the side of those who love quiet; for quiet (I cannot help this truism) can be enjoyed quietly; it blesses him that gives and him that takes. But noise hits us blindly and aggressively; it bludgeons the ears of everyone in its neighbourhood; and in the outer perimeter, where it has ceased to bludgeon, it plucks intermittently, banjo fashion, at one's aural consciousness. The simple thing that must be said about the noise-makers is that they couldn't care less; yet ninety-nine times out of a hundred they are not active sadists; quite possibly it *may* not increase their pleasure in noise to know that those who love quiet are being tortured. They just *make* a noise. They are, I hate to believe and do believe, in a large majority. So for the rest of us there is no escape and no redress. They assault us with their noise, but you cannot assault them with quiet. You can attack with a pneumatic drill but not with a benison. And thus they are the constant murderers of goodwill; we need a pause of quiet to remember where we put that goodwill after we last used it.

And law and order, government and landlord, public opinion and sympathy and modern invention, are all on the side of the noise-monger. There is an idea that a liking for noise argues cheerfulness and good health, a sane mind in a sane body; and that those who pray for quiet (and with intention I use the word *pray*) must be hyper-sensitive, anti-social, neurotic, superior, wet-blankets and spoil-sports, and if they want to live in a padded cell, let them!

Certainly they are fitting us for a padded cell, but apart from that, we may reverse their unthinking indictment. People who love quiet are self-sufficient and therefore un-neurotic; they can bear to think, and do not have to arrange for the drowning of

thoughts like a litter of unwelcome kittens the moment they are born. - The tendency of an entire generation not so much to turn on the wireless, as to *leave* on the wireless, leave it on when they go out and hear it braying when they return (or rather, not hear it, for noise has numbed their ability to hear) reveals something so maladjusted and unbalanced that it should be traced to an original cause and dealt with by qualified psycho-therapists as though it were a disease affecting national health.

For some obscure reason, they are less pleased, these fanatics, when the wireless is turned down so low that they can hear what is being said, sung or played; luckily this can be easily remedied; they have only to turn a knob, and it can be made to blare forth in full force (however cheap the instrument) triumphantly bawling down its own coherence, dispensing with the very reason for its existence. Approaching a closed window of a stronghold from a considerable distance away, you are aware of the air being mangled . . . but ah! how much nicer when the window is open! Why close it when the wireless is on? And by the same motivation, why turn it off when you are going out? Two wirelesses in the same house are better than one, that goes without saying, especially on different programmes.

They cannot listen; they cannot hear; they cannot do without it; they crave noise like a drug; they crave it as the sleepless long for sleep, and as we, the rest of us, long for quiet.

But Guglielmo Marconi's wireless is not the only assassin of silence. In the same cacophony we have Thomas Alva Edison's gramophone; and the piano-thumpers who once had it all their own way but are now somewhat impotent performers against the panzer ferocity of an electrical amplifier. I have already mentioned the pneumatic drill; swing bands at restaurants have a neat little speciality in their repetitive quality, bringing hope and life and joy to meal-time. Motor horns and traffic are nothing new; nor is a car, left standing with the engine running; but the war has temporarily modified that torture.

I have never cared for sopranos; though, speaking as a gruff old uncle holding forth about his nephews and nieces, sopranos in their proper place are all very well. It is my own loss that I am no advocate for the human voice lifted in song, except for a very few exceptions. Nor for the human voice lifted in anything else, especially at night when I am falling asleep, especially outside my bedroom door, on the stairs and in the corridors of hotels, especially

just beyond my bedroom window when the party next door breaks up: . . . "Good night" . . . "Lovely time" . . . "Bless you, my sweet"—(Bless *you*, my sweet, for ever and ever)—"Ring you to-morrow, not too early, you'll want to sleep" . . . Joke, joke, gorgeous joke about being tight, laughter, joke shouted louder as party recedes from its host at the front door . . . Riposte bellowed back . . .

The scene shifts. We leave our home and go for a holiday ("You need a thorough rest," said the doctor; "early bed and take it easy"). Early bed and falling asleep. Then a shock—The heart staggers awake. What's happening? House on fire? Somebody ill? Accident? Air-raided?

This is what's happening:

"Going to have a bath?"

"Yes, I think so, makes me sleep better. Unless *you* want it?"

"Oh, I'll have it after you; bang on my door when you're out."

"Righty-o. Harry in yet?"

"Still downstairs, hope he won't be long; just having a chin-wag with Mr. Binks."

"I don't expect he'll be long."

"No, he won't be long. Well, good night."

"Sure you're all right?"

"Yes, I'm all right, thanks ever so much."

"Don't want anything?"

"Don't think so; at least, you might ask Joanie to come along. I want to tell her something about the morning."

. . . "That you, Joanie? No, you can't come in, Sid's undressing . . ." (giggles. Joke, joke, slightly verging joke).

Joanie (in passage): "Speak up, I can't hear . . . Righty-o. Good night. 'Night, Sid, see you in the morning!" (If I could prevent it, would they ever meet again, Joanie and Sid?)

It is a personal idiosyncrasy of mine not to wish to know the time when I cannot sleep. It adds to my panic, waiting for the church clock to strike ("Now it's twelve o'clock—I must be asleep by three, and even then I shall only get five hours. One, two, three—I must be asleep by four, I simply *must* . . .") Quite an unreasonable form of panic and therefore I cannot expect it to be pampered; nearly everybody else likes to hear a church clock strike the hours at night. But a church clock which melodiously chimes the *quarters* as well as the hours, by that, surely, my exaspera-



tion is completely justified. Not long ago I was having a holiday in a lovely quiet place where a year ago I had enjoyed perfect rest after the good-night voices had finally died down. The church was opposite my bedroom window, less than fifty yards away. Gradually I realized, the year after, that there had been a strong change for the better in our war news, and a change for the worse in its very very tiny repercussion on that precious, carelessly accepted night tranquillity. Winston Churchill had released the ban on the chimes. Proudly and melodiously, near and clear and loud, that church clock told me the time every quarter of an hour, right through the night and right through every night. If I fell asleep between the quarters, it woke me ten minutes later to tell me that it was a quarter past, half past, or a quarter to.

One cannot argue with a church clock chiming and striking its endless platitudes, and my heart failed at the idea of visiting the power behind the chimes, plaintively to question whether indeed there were people who wanted to know the time *every* quarter of an hour *all* through the night, even if their own watches were broken and had gone to be repaired seven-and-a-half months ago, even then—? It was easier to give up my room, give up my holiday and come home.

At home, we must not forget Alexander Graham Bell's telephone. The telephone bell striking upon the ear, can, as far as I am concerned, produce four distinct reactions as well as a hundred more subtle. First, when it is heaven's own carillon whatever time it rings, day or night, disturbing you from work, rousing you from sleep, calling you back when you have started to go out, calling you upstairs when you are down, downstairs when you are up; to put it succinctly, when it is That Call for which you have waited and can hardly bear to wait any longer (see Dorothy Parker's serene and happy little sketch on the subject). Next, the legitimate sound when the call is of professional, business or domestic urgency, such as your plumber, or your bank manager; they, too, may ring up at any time, when you are at work, asleep, going out, upstairs or downstairs. Next, the impenitent trill of the telephone ringing when it is a friend, when it is Robin Maugham or Gladys Calthrop or Marguerite or Gill or Rebecca or Kate Mary; when it is someone whom you like talking to but who had absolutely no right to ring you up during working hours when the awful decree has gone forth that you must not be disturbed except on matters of life or death; but if work happens to be lagging, well—you are

human and you welcome the interruption ; you are, in fact, frankly delighted ; you do not send back a cold enquiry : "is your message really necessary ?" Heaven forgive us, you gossip.

Fourth and last (heavy breathing through the nostrils) the uncouth twangle, nagging on the air, of the telephone bell shattering the spell of silence when work is going well, when you have just fallen asleep, when you are going out and are late already, when you are upstairs, when you are downstairs— And it is a wrong number, or a foolish acquaintance or somebody you barely know who wants the address of somebody you don't know but they think you do, or the shop to say re your enquiry they will not have it in stock before next January *if* then (there's a war on). Or the genus : "I just rang up, haven't heard from you for such ages, wondered how you were ?"

My submission to the business-necessity sort of call extends itself in a way that interests me psychologically, for it shows how one's automatic response to noise of any sort is dictated by the reason for such noise, and not only by its volume or nature. It is not imagination when I state that I can bear with equanimity, and without my nerves behaving like a homicidal maniac dancing with a temperamental gorilla on a floor of hot bricks, the noise of gunfire during raids ; of convoys of tanks, trucks and Bren carriers thundering along the highway ; of the war-time urgency of the news bulletin for those who have to go off to work early ; of workmen and builders hammering and shouting at their overtime job of setting destruction to rights. These, to me, represent sound as opposed to noise. My attitude to the former is acquiescent and then relaxed. And this can only be because my subconscious self is logical and, without any assistance from the top self, can recognize when disturbance is inevitable, constructive and useful, and therefore sends up a message that in spite of it I am to go on working or sleeping, for this is part of the world going round, and therefore I can let myself go with it and not widdershins.

And I not only accept, but truly enjoy natural and elemental noise ; wind and rain and thunder, weir and waterfall, however near and however strong. I can relish as though it were a waterfall, the noise of a big crowd gathered for some good-humoured occasion, provided I am raised above it at an open window with an exit behind me ; and this proviso is certainly not for any haughty reasons, but from physical panic of being stifled down there among them, for I am not tall and not strong and have always been

claustrophobic. But to watch a crowd and hear a crowd is gorgeous entertainment; the crowd assembled for a Lord Mayor's Show, and for Derby Day in the old days, or to cheer Kings and heroes, or at a Kermesse when sharp cries detach themselves from the bee-loud glade and then get absorbed again in a swell of amorphous bonhomie. Cocks crowing, cows lowing (though not when their calf has been taken away from them), the romantic quality of all train sounds (except shunting) provided one is not staying in the Hotel de la Gare or in that bijou dwelling on the railway embankment—I cannot explain why I place trains among “natural and elemental” sounds I genuinely enjoy, but I recall how amazed I was when Arnold Bennett produced a little box of pink wax pellets from his waistcoat pocket and recommended them earnestly for stuffing in the ears during the early mornings of early spring when the bird choir is loud and exultant.

But it is when I am helplessly exposed to noise that is categorized under “pleasure”, when I have to participate in somebody else's idea of “entertainment” which they have not the decency to concentrate within their own radius, but allow to splay out and splash in all directions, it is then that reason is lost and I cease to be a civilized human being. Ophelia sighs in a lucid moment: “Lord, we know what we are, but we know not what we may be,” . . . And I, in my lucid moments, have sometimes wondered by what process I have been translated into that Old Wet-Blanket whom I remember over and over again from the angle of my own youth, my own uncomprehending youth. We know what we are, but we know not what we may be!

But always there has been Bacchus and his crew, Comus and his rabble rout, Mercutio and his revellers, Jack Falstaff and Prince Hal, or, changing from myth to flesh and blood, always there will be young Shakespeare and Kit Marlow with their light-hearted companions at the Mermaid, to swagger and swear and sing; to mock at interference, and laughing send to the devil all such curmudgeons as myself who are constant to protect from violation the still sanctuaries of quiet. Is life noise, or is noise life? We cry as soon as we breathe, and we draw our last breath with a rattle in the throat; so if it be natural to clamour and shout, I must ask pardon for my love Silence, and beg youth to believe that it is not from intolerance of their senseless gaiety (for why should gaiety be burdened with sense?), but only an appeal that I need not have to share it uninvited; and not even share it whole, but be beset

instead by the torn litter of gaiety that blows along my way, spoiling whatever I would be at of my own free will. We are conquered by noise, shackled to it and dragged along its dictator route.

For noise is a killer. That it should kill concentration on any form of creative work, and that writers and mathematicians should be especially vulnerable, is a fact as obvious as that seven pneumatic drills just outside a hospital is not conducive to the patients' speedy recovery. One has learned, I hope not too bitterly, that creative workers cannot claim official protection. But I am still incredulous that during conditions of a country at war, it has not been recognized that these noises I have been describing afflict war-time workers who can justly claim such protection. Disturb their sleep, waste their potential reserves of energy, send them back to their vital jobs, whether by day or by night, feeling harassed, irritable and unrefreshed. Here, in this conjunction, one would have thought that their importance could have commanded a more forcible rescue from headquarters than that occasional meek "we ask you to remember . . ." when there may be a moment to spare between programmes on the B.B.C. Such reminders prove that headquarters is not ignorant of what is going on, but are, most strangely, not awake to their own power to enforce, instead of merely plead for the utmost consideration.

Why has this happened? This unappeasable lust to batter and destroy quiet, bothered as the drunkard is bothered in the presence of one whose palate derives pleasure from a glass of good wine?

To require noise, not, mark you, to love or appreciate it, is a sign of fundamental dissatisfaction which springs from some fundamental fear or lack. An outburst of noise is different; there are moments when it really can mean happiness and fellowship, even the right sort of collective emotion. When we all cheer together and sing, not to join in, or worse, not even wish to join in, is often churlish, supercilious and self-conscious. But noise for the sake of making a noise, noise because quiet is your enemy, noise because you do not wish to think, noise because you are oblivious to the work or weariness of those surrounding you, noise because it gives out a superficial resemblance to cheerfulness, noise because your ear has grown totally unresponsive and therefore it might as well be on as off—That the control of noise which springs from these causes should be in the power of these sub-sensitives, is a thought so frightening and so forlorn that only the memory of a

vast audience surrendered to symphony can assure us that we still have one weapon with which to conquer it. You cannot fight noise with quiet; you cannot disarm your opponent by a gesture of disarmament. Sound and symphony are positive; gradually they may conquer that aural paranoia which can inflict so much cruelty and so much hurt.

Tail-piece: a cable received by the B.B.C. from an officer on the North West Frontier—"Burning days stop mysterious nights stop give us more military marches."

## CHAPTER X

### PALM GROVE GALLERIES

**I** TRUST it will not seem at all absurd to the serious-minded if I now try to select eight pictures to be thrown up with me on the desert island—(nothing could be more likely than that they should be ready in waterproof packing on the raft). For after all, why not? We are for ever at it, choosing the eight desert island books: Shakespeare, the Bible, Gibbon and so forth. And lately, the B.B.C. has boldly opened up the desert island discs controversy. So I do really think that a few good pictures hanging on the walls—no, hanging from the trees would help to lift the monotony of that eternal view of palm, blue sea and yellow sand, with an occasional turtle thoughtfully laying an egg on the centre foreground. Naturally one would choose pictures carefully adapted to meet the needs of the soul on a desert island. Tropical seascapes would be a little superfluous, for which reason I would relinquish the idea of having at least three of the best Gauguins to teach what's what to the scenery and colours. Yet on second thoughts, Gauguin's was no island which could ever exist except seen through his eyes and translated by his own peculiar magic; a sort of rotting magic of strange Gauguin yellows and Gauguin purples that burn and smoulder through the dusk. His is the island which lies behind all islands and their insufficiency, glowing through the clear, darkly-luminous air. You can dwell on any rich island of tropical spices and enchanted colour and still be divided by a mocking hair's-breadth from the island Gauguin painted: the island you only see

if you are a genius, a drunkard, dying and supremely dreaming . . . Yes, I will start with his picture, you must know it well, a procession of Tahitian women carrying fruit.

I believe I would forbid myself all portraits, though I should deeply miss Rembrandt: for it would be too much of a test even for the most wonderful portrait in the world, to live with it all down the blaze of days. Certainly if they fretted your nerves, you could turn their faces to the bark, but that would be rather a waste of any of the precious eight. A solitary exception, Dürer's portrait of himself which hangs—or which once hung—in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. I went to see it daily while I was there in 1929; and it was only on the last day that a casual word informed me it was not the face of Christ but of the artist. I still cannot help thinking of it as Dürer's Christ.

But no other portraits. Sargent's dashing portrait of three tall fair daughters, ours or anyone's, in their Presentation gowns and feathers and pearls, would be a little too exciting for the natives should they chance to land unexpectedly at the lagoon and come rushing up the shore to see if we had any beads and alarm-clocks.

Pictures of interiors would be wistfully appreciated, especially during a sandstorm. Cosy Dutch interiors with well-scrubbed tiles and a bright china stove; every piece of furniture, every dish in its proper place; and the careful *Mevrouw* with her cleaner-than-clean face, earnestly preparing a meal. A Vermeer or a Pieter de Hooch. Vermeer is the greater artist; but not his *Lady in Blue* reading a letter, because letters are better left unmentioned during that lifetime (as specified) that we have to spend on the desert island.

One interior, then; and more than one picture of streets and houses which attract me even when I am living in the heart of London or Paris. What could be more appropriate for this collection than Sickert's lovely impression of the curve of Brighton front, or of the Crescent in Bath, or a house in Broadstairs? Sickert is a peculiarly infectious artist; by which I do not mean, of course, that one gazes at a lot of Sickerts and then goes home and paints exactly like him; but I do remember after an hour spent at a Sickert Exhibition, coming away with his outlook on the living world so vividly captured by the retina, that during a long drive directly afterwards, everything I saw collected into a characteristic Sickert picture; indigo thundercloud in the West, and the sun streaming from the East on to the barrage balloons, giving them the

appearance of shining silver bladders, semi-transparent, twisting with ears up into freakish shapes against the blue-black sky. I suppose one can explain this phenomenon by saying his vision is so strongly individual that it imposes itself upon yours like a palimpsest; and yet so directly concerned with the normal things that we see about us all day and every day, that we do not have to go seeking them at odd eccentric angles among people and places set apart as "paintable". Corot can bring the same effect from a wood, any wood, beside a lake, any lake; invaluable gift of green shade, tender and silvery, to heal your eyes when they are aching from shadeless sea and fierce uncaring sky.

For I have never been one of these sun-children who wander about disconsolate until they find a climate where they can lie and bask and burn and feel the heat strike through their bones. Nor do I care for days that are mild and colourless, or bleak and dreary; stuffy grey weather and stuffy grey days when one longs and longs for brightness to spangle the air. But I like to lie and watch brightness falling in gold just beyond where it can touch me; watch it falling through leaves. Shadow beauty . . . I have seen a picture recently, I cannot remember where or who painted it, of the shadow of leaves and tendrils sprayed on a sun-swept wall, somehow lovelier than the foliage itself.

I like light lacy shade; when the sun drips through slots in the trees and boughs, dappling the ground. And I like the shade which falls softly round your boat when you thrust it out of the broad sunlight into a tent of willow shadow that overhangs the river, in and then out again, leaving coolness behind. I like shadows that sway on the walls of a house; shadows on grass, and sharper on wet grass in the early morning; I like chunks and cubes of solid shade; and blue shadows of the snow; and stripes of shadow slanting on the long French roads from the Lombardy poplars that Napoleon planted so that future armies of France need not, like his Grande Armée, march sweating in the unsparing sun. I like the slatted shade of the South falling in ruled lines on the tiled floors; and the fantasy shadows thrown in the streets of the little French towns and villages by lemon-coloured lamps tangled in the chestnut-trees, and equally in London where the lamp-posts stand beside plane-trees. And I like shade without shape or edges; forest shade, cool and ferny and aromatic; you step into it out of the hot bright air, and are thankful. And the cold shade on marble or on the sand at the entrance of sea-caves. And I love

the racing shadow of a huge cloud darkening the Downs; and the flying shadow of a seagull across a pool while you are bending down to look for shells. Why, I wonder, is the shadow of a bird in movement so infinitely more exciting, more romantic than the bird itself?

Sir William Nicholson (known throughout the town as "Night-Bell Nicholson", if one is to believe the legend on his front door) has painted a corner of the Brighton Esplanade gleaming with rain and swept by a gale that topples the little green chairs into undignified upside-downs. You can hardly see the sea, but the seagulls tossed this way and that, above and beyond the rail, show the violence of the wind beating down the Channel. One or two figures struggle along, tightly holding themselves together; everything is flapping and shining. I wanted that battered familiar scene to hang in my London room; and certainly to hang on a tropical desert island, calling it "Rosemary for Remembrance"; and there indeed I can have it; but not in the world of fact, for William would not allow it. From his own severely high standard, he said it was done for fun and not really a good painting. Later, enquiring after it with melancholy tenderness, I was told that since canvases were getting short in the third year of the war, he had light-heartedly scraped it out, to use the canvas for another picture. This seemed to me the height of irreverence and I was horrified, but he laughed and asked me if I had never written on the back of a discarded manuscript: "That's different," I said . . .

For my desert island collection, my choice of a Nicholson would probably be of a slope of the Berkshire Downs near Brambleford—a picture I called "innocent", for it was painted with such simple mastery passing through and beyond the stages of sophistication, that in its final light greens and straw yellows, it might have been an illustration torn out of a child's story-book. The curve of the little girl's cheek in Renoir's "*La Première Sortie*" has that same quality of innocence, though naturally more obvious in a child than in a slope of a field after the corn has been cut; nevertheless, it did not need Renoir's title to tell us that the little girl sitting in the theatre, so breathless, so serious, so intent and well-behaved, was being taken to a play for the first time in her young sheltered life of *Lycée* or *Gouvernante*.

While I was actually buying a Nicholson, I chose his picture of the Bay at La Rochelle in the evening light: a semi-circle of sea without waves, clear and calm in the warm green evening, curved



like a perfect curve in heaven, like a phrase of music answering all restless questions, seen and painted with a certainty which was the end of torment. It hangs above the fireplace in my Albany room that looks out on the Rope-Walk. But I do not choose it for my desert island collection, for the excellent reason that I already have it. Because I no longer have it, I will choose instead that uncharacteristic Newton, a seascape of cloud and spume driving in on the English coast; it hung on the wall of my room in Albany that looked down Savile Row and was destroyed by the raids in October, 1940. My desert island Nicholson, if it is not to be the innocent Berkshire Downs, will be quietly but firmly spirited away from Chardwell on a dark night when the Winston Churchills are not looking. The artist was staying there to paint a portrait of the Prime Minister; and on his half-day, used to wander down to the lake . . . Then he noticed a black swan swimming to and fro bringing helpful material to his mate building her nest on the little island. A wild black swan, one assumes, but enchained for a spell by the power of love; next year he will let her do her own building. All the oddments that he fetched for her, bits of twig and grass and reed, she accepted and immediately wove into the nest; and then William saw the black swan sailing towards her with a daffodil in his beak, and that too she thought excellent and *just* what she had been looking for: original without being too gaudy, durable and weather-resisting, and a cheerful colour that the cygnets would enjoy. You can see in the picture, if you look closely, the tiny spot of yellow in the black swan's beak. I cannot tell why it seems to hold the very essence of romantic strangeness . . .

One uses the words "essence" and "quality" and "an involuntary romantic feeling" indolently, perhaps for want of clear thinking. Yet even after thought, I can draw no nearer definition than to say that this is the quality, in a voice, in a picture, in a corner of the road, which thrills you unreasonably. It is not amazing to be thrilled by the discovery of the corpse in the chimney, nor by a true tale of heroism heard for the first time. But if we try to pursue that other thrill, which appears to have no identity or address or excuse for its existence, it fades and vanishes. One picture by Chirico (one, not all), suddenly gave me this amazement, this click of the heart, by its romantic feeling: a white stallion galloping along the sand, a little black horse tearing along after him, wild with excitement, using every art to attract his attention and arrest his pace. I believe I remember that she had just succeeded

to do since Kitty, bless her, ordered none but the best coal and that did give out a heat— “So what do you think, Mr. So-and-so? You know where to buy one, you being an artist and just sold a picture, Kitty tells me, though you’re not one to need to.”

The artist, shying a little nervously from the stained-glass screen, pointed out to Mum wickedly that she had a blank place on the wall (and she had too, just!) and he would instead, if she liked, give her one of his own pictures to fill it up. “I know about that blank place,” retorted Mum; “you might say it was an accident. I kept it for a tinted enlargement I had of my Kitty when she was twelve, but she simply wouldn’t have it, so there’s the empty place and I can’t say, Mr. So-and-so, speaking frankly and no offence meant, that I’d much care for one of yours hanging there just where it shows most. If it had been one of the bedrooms now . . . but my Kitty’s not one to stint her Mum and she said I could go and buy myself a picture, anything I fancy. I might have a look round to-morrow, being Tuesday and can’t go to a *matinée*.”

It was natural we should speculate among ourselves as to what would be Mum’s fancy, and what bold atrocity we should find filling the empty space “just where it showed most”, next time we went to the Edwardian villa. It became a sort of game, swopping prophetic visions of “the atrocity”. We decided that it would hardly be fair to let one of us get in first and have all the pleasure of telling the others; so we would find out from Kitty, casual-like, if her Mum had bought a picture yet, and then all go together and let it burst upon us.

“Yes, she has,” replied Kitty; “it was damned expensive too; I can’t think why, because there’s nothing much in it and it’s not a bit like Mum.”

“Do you mean she’s had her portrait painted?”

“No, I mean not a bit like Mum’s taste.”

Oh, Mum’s taste.

“Still, there you are, and it was the only one she’d have. Obstinate as an old mule,” affectionately giving in Kitty idiom what the Donkey-boy in “*Bella Donna*” eternally repeated to Mrs. Patrick Campbell: “What milady want she must have” . . .

“I offered her this and I offered her that, and plenty to choose from and plenty she liked before she fell for this one. The thing that flummoxed me is that Rene likes it, and for Mum and Rene to agree, well!”

Thrilled at such a rich phantasmagoria of possibilities, I asked: "Who's it by?"

"Can't remember the name," said Kitty. "Some man. You'd better come and see."

Some man was Utrillo.

"Nice, isn't it?" Mum stood complacently with her head cocked on one side. "What I say is, you might be there!"

As we were still too stunned for comment, she chatted on: "Rene, for once, agrees with me. But you wouldn't believe the nonsense she's been talking about how we ought to clear away all the other views and pictures and photos so as to have that one hanging by itself over the mantelpiece. Well, I said, that *would* look bare! Still," proudly, "you don't often see a picture like that, not in a month of Sundays, do you? Best part of £300 it cost my Kitty. I'd no idea pictures ever cost as much as that, not pictures one could buy oneself. It included the frame, but I've seen frames no worse for 30/-, gilt, too. I tried to bargain with the man, but he wouldn't take a penny less."

Most certainly you do not often see a picture like that, though Utrillo is such a prolific painter. The usual two Paris streets joined at a corner, a thin covering of snow on the ground, the little café chairs against their iron tables up-ended, and that struck a note of desolation in spite of the cheerful familiar signs *Blanchisserie*, *Charcuterie* and *Tabac* . . . But, as usual again, I have to fall back on fugitive escaping phrases like the "essence", the "elusive quality", "a romantic feeling" . . .

Afterwards we went into committee again. If it had been fascinating to wonder and imagine what picture Mum was going to buy, given a free hand and a free purse, it was fifty times more enthralling to try and discover *why* this quiet corner of Paris, seen through Utrillo's eyes and brush, furnished Mum's soul as well as her sitting-room with such satisfaction? We were bewildered, horribly envious, and a little ashamed when we remembered how we had let imagination go tipsy beforehand over the sort of picture we had expected to find. Gradually, instead of forgetting all about it, we became obsessed with the psychology of the whole incident. Separately or in groups, we led Mum to talk about her treasure, hoping to pick up some clue for her lapse into good taste. We took her to the National Gallery and to the Tate and to private shows, but not once did her comments reveal that in the slightest degree did she know what she was talking about on the subject

of pictures; her preferences matched the rest of the sitting-room: "Too modern for me!" or, on the other hand: "I call that a dull sort of picture", over any in the Utrillo class. Once, when she stood crowing with approbation in front of—I prefer that the horror should remain anonymous—I asked as casually as I could: "Wouldn't you have liked that instead of the one you've got now?" "Instead of the one in my sitting-room? Instead of my Paris view?" I nodded: "Yes, the Utrillo." She cared nothing for the artist, but you should have heard the possessive tenderness with which she said: "*My* Paris view" . . .

"Go on! I wouldn't change it, not for that nor any other."

"Well, but *why*?"

"I like it best."

The reason remained a mystery. We never found out why. And because it was so tantalizing not to know, I invented a story to cover the blank, and related it to the others. And in time, because our vanity could not bear the lacuna, we accepted this story as though it were true and as though Mum herself had told us.

Mr. Thompson *would* have it that he'd take me to Paris for our honeymoon. He was a great man for abroad. And when I said "Well, there's Torquay" he wouldn't hear of it. "And you mustn't think," he'd say to me, because he was a serious man and read a lot, "you mustn't think of Paris as Gay Paree; there's lots that isn't gay at all, like the Invalids, for instance; but the streets are gay," he said, "and you'll enjoy those when you've seen the historical monuments I've been saving up for you." So it was settled; and we had a lovely wedding, though Mr. Thompson took some of the joking too seriously; our Rene is like him in lots of ways, but Kitty's like me. And the journey was dreadful, not a bit like what I'd expected on the Channel, and my going-away costume not nearly thick enough and my new stays too tight, though they did give me a nice figure in my wedding-dress. And the jabber, jabber, jabber at the station, and the way the cabman drove us to the hotel, and Mr. Thompson, perhaps he was still a bit annoyed at me laughing so much over what had been said when we cut the cake, he was ever so grave and not a bit like a honeymoon, so that I couldn't help wondering why I loved him so much, but oh dear, I did, and that's a thing you can't explain.

Mind, I still think we wouldn't have quarrelled like that, the

very same evening and all, if I'd had my way and we'd gone to Torquay. There was something about that French hotel bedroom made me want to sit down and cry from the moment we got in. I was never one to give way, more's the pity, but instead, I got a bit carping about the funny smell and the way they'd looked at us in the hall, and the chambermaid being a man, and not being able to have so much as a cup of tea so what was the use of Mr. Thompson keeping on about putting on my hat again and coming out for a syrup or a grenadier? Not but that presently I was to get to like those grenadiers, same as when I got back to England I missed what I found in the Paris hotel when I poked round instead of a bathroom—and even got in the plumber, later on in Hornsey, and asked him if he could build me up the same? Only it took a lot of explaining and he was shocked and I laughed at him for an old stick-in-the-mud.

But on that first evening in Paris, it was me that was the stick-in-the-mud, and one thing led to another, and I was most to blame, for how could he know how a bride feels, what with telling us girls a bit less than half and us trying to guess the other half? And then the journey on top of it and the cold and wishing I needn't ever have got married at all. But anyhow it got so that he picked up his hat and said: "Right! I'm going for a walk and I don't know when I'll be back."

"Please yourself, I'm sure," I answered him, just managing not to cry, "and as for your silly little hip-bath that you're so touchy about, you can take it away under your arm for all I care. It's a *proper* bath I want; one I can get *in* to!"

It might have been two hours or it might have been three, but they were the worst I ever had. Sitting there in that room, not liking to unpack for fear he never came back and what should I do then, and not feeling a bit married, and there I was alone, not able to speak a word of their horrid French so I couldn't even ask for a glass of water though my throat was as dry as anything, what with the crossing and nothing to drink since, and all that crying now that it came, you know what that does to your throat, but as for drinking water from the bedroom tap I'd been warned enough about that: I might as well have killed myself there and then, and that's what I felt like doing. Oh, it was downright *cruel* of him to go away and leave me in that state for hours and hours and hours. "Now don't you be a big silly," I kept on saying out loud, so that I could at least hear someone speaking good English,

even me myself was better than nothing : "Don't be a big silly!"—but it wasn't any good, so I tried going to the window to watch perhaps if I could see him coming, though he can't have been gone long, but he might have felt sorry, this being our honeymoon and everything. But not a sign; just a few of their nasty shops, and one or two queer-looking people walking about, and nasty lumpy cobbles making twice as much noise as in Hornsey, and as if that wasn't enough, it began to snow, not heavy snow, just enough to give you the dismals.

I suppose you'd say I lost my head then. All of a sudden I just didn't care what I did. I didn't care about anything except getting out of that bedroom and out of that hotel and finding Arthur before he did something to himself; that is, if he wasn't run over already. I didn't even wait for my hat and gloves, and I didn't care who saw I was a cry-baby, I ran out and ran downstairs and passed that porter-man without a word till he came after me and started gabbling like a fool, trying to stop me, but I gave him a sort of push and I might have said, "Mr. Thompson," I don't remember—but he said "Oh wee" and pointed and I looked—

And there was my Arthur coming round the corner of the street and he wasn't dead and I wish you could have seen his smile when he saw me standing there . . .

So you see, in my surmise, Utrillo and art had not come into the story at all. By chance; the picture of those two Paris streets converging at a corner had so closely resembled the scene of Mr. Thompson's return that to Mum, over thirty years afterwards, it brought back the most radiant moment in her whole life, with its glory of warmth and relief and reassurance. Of course no other picture would have done. Of course she was obstinate about it . . . You couldn't, for instance, sit in front of "The Fighting Téméraire" and think of Arthur :

Reassurance is a quality which cannot possibly arrive in a picture by conscious desire of the painter; nor is it ever called Reassurance even when the commercial photographer tries to go to town on it, showing us our Royal Family, our Royal Castles, our Prime Minister and other leaders and institutions, in fine healthy colours, so that people's fears may be allayed and their souls take comfort when our national artists do their four-square duty. Then by what unsolicited gift can we gain this reassurance against the bright

indifference of a desert island? If I were collecting those eight pictures for my own home in London or the country, I should long ago have hung on the wall Watteau's famous "L'Indifférent" of the Louvre . . . That insolent, indolent youth in blue satin, caring only for himself, and that not even passionately. I have just called him a youth, but there is hardly any youth in his jaded young sophistication that finds nothing in the Versailles day worth doing; the very swing of his cloak on his outstretched arm betrays the emptiness of existence, for the arm is stretched out towards nothing and because of nothing. If one happened to be leading a life informed with vitality and meaning, "L'Indifférent" would be the perfect picture; but I think I can safely reject it for the island. The soul of "L'Indifférent" *was* a desert island.

Instead, I will have Vincent's Chair, by Van Gogh. Nicholson once painted a picture which he called "The Hundred Jugs", but no multiplication into a hundred chairs, designed to give an illusion of dinner-parties and civilized Indoors and the finite comfort of Mr. Drage, could ever inspire such reassurance as that one chair, sturdy, short in the leg, rush-seated, plain and truthful. It is the essence of chair; created neither for beauty nor decoration, but because man works hard and is tired after his work. "Truthful" may sound affected in relation to chair, but I believe that a picture has no power to reassure unless the truth be in it first. A picture can be true without being reassuring, but it cannot possibly be reassuring unless it be true and unsentimental.

A Van Gogh cornfield, preferably a golden one, would be a too unbearable reminder of Provence if hung from a coconut palm. On the other hand, though I love his blazing patches of garden near Arles, I cannot quite divide them from their association, which G. F. Watts would have called "Life Triumphant Over Insanity". For many years Van Gogh headed my personal preference list in the French Impressionist school—setting Gauguin away from the rest, in a place of strangeness that had little to do with preference. Then a distinguished art dealer, a man who really knew his onions (how and where did this marvellous idiom originate?) told me that I must wake up and learn by instruction if I could not feel by instinct, that Renoir was far and away the greatest painter of them all (and lo! Ben Abou's name led all the rest!). So under Duncan Macdonald's guidance, I did learn to appreciate Renoir as I should. Especially the picture of a naked girl

sitting on the edge of a rock pool holding up a tress of hair . . . I could feel the texture of the hair in a silky crunch between my own fingers, as I gazed ; nevertheless, my unprofessional spirit remained mutinous, faithful to Van Gogh. Dido Milroy produced an interesting theory on the subject : that only a man would be one hundred per cent. receptive of the genius of Renoir, because his vision is so vibrantly sensual and this comes at you so clearly from his paintings, that its first impact on a woman's eye is a shock, as if you were being shown almost too much. She suggested that a woman can and will accept and appreciate the manifest beauty of a Renoir canvas, but always with a sort of involuntary reserve ; living with a Renoir was as disturbing as living with a completely uninhibited man, and even his landscapes have an underlying quality of the flesh, subtly emphasizing physical attraction. Few of us have the luck or the wealth that enables us to live every day surrounded by the pictures of a Master, so that we do not have to go out especially to look at them, and look at them too long, and then come home again and wish we could have another look ; her comment, therefore, has the authority of one who has worked in the Paris appartement of Jean Renoir, the famous film director, a master in his own line, a line of impressionism not so far removed from his father's. Renoir's one picture where he leaves out that idiosyncrasy was his moving unselfish portrait of Sisley and his wife. You find it again in his glorious bowl of apples, which I will have upon the island.

Sisley painted a snow picture, many snow pictures, but a special one which I certainly would not refuse for my island collection. He knew that snow was ethereal, that it lay softly and melted quickly, and between its fall and vanishing, brushes his scene with light enchantment. Vlaminck, on the contrary, puts down his snow in stiff ridges ; you can hear them crunch if a car should drive over them. Indeed, were it not that paint endured longer, it seems a pity that he should not have used snow itself reinforced with mud. His boldness and drama of technique assault your eye. His very country roads and sunsets and harvests and vases of flowers and other peaceful hackneyed gentle subjects are brilliant and catastrophic and lurid. He wrenches his paint on to the canvas. It lies in thick swirls and ruts.

And I will have Monet's "Le Débâcle", which has a faery quality of ice flushed and cracked by the winter sun, floating and jangling down the river. When I first came across the Impressionists, I fell in love with Monet and his water-lilies, and barely noticed the rest



of the group. Nor need I confess to this with any shame as a juvenile taste, rapidly adding that I have grown out of it. The Monet *Nenuphars* do not deserve that; their drowsy green and rose and white, their shadowy blues, light sliding and swaying from flower to stem, stem to root, cool under the water, still ripple gratefully through my memory. Yet perhaps they are more easily loved than the work of other painters of the same school, and therefore one can say, not that one has grown out of them, but swerved sideways towards Van Gogh, Renoir, Degas, Gauguin, Sisley; and later, Bonnard, Boudin, Utrillo and Vlaminck.

Another of my more juvenile enthusiasms, yet still far from any phase on which one hastily shuts the door, was the artist Franz Marc whom I adopted with such warmth after my first visit to Munich; I could not be satisfied till I was given an excellent reproduction of his *Little Red Horses* to hang in the sitting-room during my eight years of pre-war Albany. Moreover, I called my favourite of my own novels "*Little Red Horses*". For the first three or four years, I was perfectly happy with Franz Marc; then gradually, those gay cobby ponies began to irritate me a very little bit, and I wished they would stop being quite so scarlet, because they must know perfectly well that they were not scarlet; nor was the pool up on the heath quite so blue; nor was there any need for quite so much caracoling—especially in the mornings . . . In fact the period of our married happiness was limited to about four years or a bit less—(quite a success, really!) and assuming that one's stay on the desert island was for life, it were better not to include Franz Marc's Horses.

But my still earlier taste was less respectable (using "respectable" literally, as Jane Austen used it). Let us boldly confront it, facing the worst first:

It was called, I think, "*Poppies*". But the poppies weren't the half of it; they were merely there to symbolize passion in the barley. The man wore, if I Remember Aright, a huge shady sun-hat, obviously the kind that one used to buy at St. Tropez and which I miss so terribly nowadays; he had a bare brown torso and something below the waistline, I forget what, but he was certainly not wholly sans culotte. And he was holding a damsel crushed up against him so that she could not have had any breath left in her body, though I believe we were allowed a glimpse of her face registering ecstasy. That was *Poppies*, that was.

It happened shortly after Pearl Harbour, that I was listening to

a cheery programme, probably for the Forces, and the announcer announced that the orchestra would now play us a quick-step, an old favourite called "Poppies" . . . They played it through at a rattling pace, to my incredulous joy. I could discover, afterwards, only one of my contemporaries who had also been listening and who had experienced the same wicked rapture as myself. For the quick-step was a relic of the Russo-Japanese war, and these were the forgotten words of the lyric :

Only a little Jappy soldier,  
 Only a duty done,  
 Wounded and weary and dying  
 Now that the battle's won.  
 Only a faded flow' ret,  
 Wet with a mother's tears,  
 Yet  
 Pressed to his heart  
 That flower plays a part  
 And robs death of all its fears.

Repeat

ONLY a little Jappy soldier . . .

That, too, was Poppies, that was.

Then I moved on, not far, into what I have frequently called my Pierrotic or sub-Beardsley strata; very black-and-white; Pierrot himself elongated out of all knowledge, forlorn and shivering, great rusty moon behind him taunting his desolation . . . I hope, in extenuation, that I was unconsciously groping my way towards Watteau's "Gilles". I am not sure if my G. F. Watts phase came before or after the pierrots. I believe before. A reproduction of his "Sir Galahad" hung in my bedroom in the Holland Park house, and I thought him the cat's whiskers. It was the shock of my life when I was taken into Eton Chapel, full of boys assembled for Evening Service; and over the crowd of heads, past the proud line of the Ram swaying in slow privilege up the aisle, I suddenly saw the Cat's Whiskers again, and knew that this time it was the original, hung there, no doubt, as an example to the little tender lads.

Turner and the pre-Raphaelites came next, and I spent hours at the Tate Gallery refreshing myself with "Rain, Steam and Speed", with "Beata Beatrix" and "Sir Isumbras at the Ford". I was not sold on "Dante's Dream", nor on "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid", probably because of Burne-Jones's hypothesis that Cophetua

was a beaver, and I did not admire beavers. As a matter of fact, I really must have been improving slightly; Turner's "Rain, Steam and Speed" can still by present standards be counted as a fine picture, and so can my first favourite among the Millais: "Christ in the Carpenter's Shop"; chiefly for the anxious young St. John afire with desire to serve, bringing the bowl of water to the Boy who has wounded His thumb, so careful not to spill one drop.

An affection for Jean Baptiste Greuze belongs to this period of my harmless unsophistication. A Greuze child, full face, soft, cherubic, docile, resting on a chubby forearm; I used to copy again and again, heaven knows why except that it seemed to give me endless pleasure; softening of the brain could have been either the cause or the result of this pastime. I liked his "Girl with Dead Bird", too, or whatever it was called; and its counterpart: the Girl looking down, a little bothered but not really upset, at the broken pitcher at her feet: "*Ça justement venait en morceaux dans mes mains.*"

From the Glasgow Gallery, I have selected a couple of attractive and wholly un-tropical Fantin Latours; one of roses with squashed half-faded pinky centres; the other of jonquils (that haunting name). And a huge Tiepolo representing the "Finding of Moses", with a tall princess lovely and delicate in a pointed yellow stomacher, followed by her handmaidens also in eighteenth-century clothes; and by her page, her dwarf and her greyhound. Moses meanwhile was raising Cain (to mix our Bible metaphors) in his cradle among the bulrushes. I would not above half mind (as Jane Austen makes Mrs. Allen say in "Northanger Abbey"), I would not above half mind having that Tiepolo among my island pictures. And after all, I must have a Rembrandt, for so far I have no Dutch pictures except a Vermeer; I have always lusted for the French and Dutch rather than the Italian painters; a "Velvet" Brueghel riverscape would not come amiss; or his "Feathered Choir". But which Rembrandt? "The Man in the Golden Helmet"? Or a Rabbi? Or one of his glorious studies of wrinkled old women? Among these I am willing to close my eyes and choose blind. Entirely as a matter of individual choice and not as criticism, I prefer those I mentioned, to the Saskia or Hendrike portraits.

Not to pile desolation on desolation, I have rejected for my lifetime on a desert island, Nevinson's "Road from Arras to Bapaume", because it is so good, not because it is so bad; and

because it epitomizes the last war . . . An empty road, and it went on and on and on. Beyond the limits of the frame, it still went on and on and on. One knew that men had marched endlessly along that road, with its few twisted wires and stricken trees. Not, emphatically, a jolly picture; at least, not a jolliness which can be compared with "The Last Day in the Old Home" (would Mr. Nevinson wish for the comparison?). "The Last Day in the Old Home" is a chummy sort of picture; I really think that I should like it for company on my uninhabited island. I should have to keep it well away from the rest: the others in dignified assembly in a palm grove in a good light; but "The Last Day in the Old Home" must hang on a bread-fruit tree with its back turned towards them, in the same way as we always have to turn that Masterpiece (reverently appearing in so many plays) which the audience, for obvious reasons, must never be allowed to see. Such works of genius have appeared in "The Late Christopher Bean", "The Doctor's Dilemma", "The Light That Failed", "Biography", "The Great Adventure", "The Moon and Sixpence", and how many others.

I have three group names under which I can catalogue crowd pictures, whatever their subject:

The Birth of Rugby Football  
Give 'em the Woiks

and more sedately:

An Enjoyable Time was had by All

Wouwerman's enchanting little skating picture is a perfect illustration of this last title. I forget which great work of genius prompted my escort in a picture-gallery, twenty-five years ago, to murmur not wholly in reverence: "The Birth of Rugby Football", but I believe it must have been Tintoretto's "Origin of the Milky Way".

"Give 'em the Woiks" sprang to my mind as a suitable title for a truly horrific crowd picture in the Hell and Death tradition, presumably of the Flemish school, hanging over the fireplace in Professor Patrick Abercrombie's study. He is one of our greatest living authorities on town planning, but from the proud position of the picture dominating the room, it would appear that he too appreciates a contrast; no one could argue that this work of art has any bearing on Better Living Conditions, though a good alternative title would be "The Town-Planner's Nightmare".

## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

Like all nightmares, the details are a little difficult to describe; but there are decomposing bodies leaping up out of their coffins; in one corner a hideous dragon's maw with monstrous hermaphrodites dangling their legs over the edge; a phantom hell-ship overflowing with the military, of whom the painter seems to have had but a poor opinion, blown on a sulphurous wind across the foreground; and, spanning the middle distance, a lurid red bridge from which the Damned are being blithely pitchforked into a bottomless abyss. That, more or less, covers the main features, but the anonymous artist, averse to waste, has filled up every spare inch of canvas with a sort of phantasmagoria of whirling limbs and gnashing teeth. No doubt but that an enjoyable time was had by all. Professor Abercrombie's pet name for his treasure is "The New Order in Europe", but one can stand in front of it, gazing, while title after title, every one of them felicitous, spring to the mind: "You Have Been Warned" introduces the religious note which I am afraid has been absent from the rest; "Pop Goes the Weasel" is perhaps a little too flippant; "Deep in the Heart of Texas" too sentimental.

I imagine that I am by now left with only two or perhaps three pictures, to make up the full eight allowed me. Call it two. I have kept the best till the end, so it is easy. I will have St. Anne from Da Vinci's "Holy Family", in the Louvre. And from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, El Greco's "Toledo".

## CHAPTER XI

### FRENCH FANTASY

HANGING in a shady corner of my sitting-room is a small bright picture called "French Fantasy". Its brightness cannot be seen unless I switch on the lamp directly under it, saying: "Look", which I do only at rare intervals, because whoever looks usually starts to cry. You see, I never light it up except for those of my friends who have, I know, loved the South of France as I loved it, miss it as I miss it. The painting itself contributes to our longing for that Mediterranean village, by its technique of having accidentally achieved the vision by innocence and daring, rather

than by skill: little crooked houses, and the church on the hill behind, and in front the incredible sea; the whole as though drawn quickly by a child in outline and then brilliantly coloured; the outline not rubbed out but allowed to show, even though on second thoughts, more mature thoughts, it might have seemed wrong. Yet were there any second thoughts to "French Fantasy"? The artist had named it happily, or it may be most unhappily, and again the title was dead right, for this place was not St. Jean Cap Ferrat, nor Le Lavandou nor Villefranche nor Cassis, no, not Cavalaire; and not Bandol either, and not St. Tropez nor St. Maxime, though every single person to whom I showed it called out one or other of these names, whichever small Southern sea-town they themselves had loved in the past and most nostalgically missed in the present wistfulness of our divorce from France. It may have been any of them, all of them, not one of them; it was a fantasy, and had the strange quality of fantasy and dream. And this fitted in with some fragment I had heard of the painter's own history which may have been truth or legend, for legends gather quickly round a picture. They said that he was an anti-Nazi refugee from Germany. He had been a successful barrister, and only began to paint after he had to leave his own country in the early days of Hitler's oppression. He did well in France; they appreciated his work; it had somewhat of the Dufy approach though not the comedy-eccentricity. Then the German occupation of France drove him forth again, and he came to England. For some inner reason which will never be solved, and which one may guess he cannot even explain himself, though (again I am guessing) he saw the beauty of England, of English fishing villages, of our little ports with steep crooked streets, of English moor and river, he rarely set out to brush it straight on to canvas. He painted from memory; and because memory is never as clear as sight, and memory has zigzag contrivances for its escape, he has been wise enough to let such instinct have its way without too much fussing about what had been true at the time. And that is probably why a later picture of his perplexed me even more by its peculiar feeling of several torn-off fragments of different places thrown together and called "Little City on a Hill". Though I met him quite recently and he told me the setting of this picture was, roughly speaking, on Highgate Hill, I believe that memory was searching far back for its material, and it had such an illogical air as to be sinister. No real little city on a hill could

be quite as terrifying, so that even while I was fascinated, I hoped that at any moment I might wake up . . . Or that he, the artist, would wake up and find he was safe.

"French Fantasy" was not frightening, or I might not have bought it: there is little point in bringing horror into one's own home where one comes back for reassurance. I bought it during the sequence of one of those amazing days which can only be assembled into coherence by that adjective, and by our recognition that coincidence and contrast have come out into the open instead of being there unseen as they certainly must be on more ordinary days; though we are apt to disbelieve it with our conscious minds, as on heavy days we disbelieve the sun is there all the time *really* and the sky vividly blue.

It began with an unexpected visit from a friend of mine who came in on tiptoe (this is the moment to destroy the touching illusion that exists in the minds of all friends and relations of authors, that if you come in on tiptoe you are not coming in at all) to say there was no need to disturb myself, she merely wished to leave a message for her husband who would be arriving presently to pick it up. The next five minutes of Christy Minstrel cross-talk brought us to a point where she recalled that after all she would be seeing him later on and could tell him herself, so when he came would I just tell him that she had something to tell him and would tell him herself so that I shouldn't be disturbed. And she withdrew, still on tiptoe and, as we novelists say when we are not bothering to think of fresh phrases, covered with confusion. After that, I decided I was too full of sweetness and light to work that morning, and went instead to a private view at the Leicester Galleries. It was clearly understood between me and my thrifty conscience that I had no intention of buying a picture; I never have; I cannot afford to buy pictures. Yet that lust is growing stronger with the years. I can resist buying jewellery (I should hope so!) and furs and antiques, and (with more difficulty) lovely old walnut furniture, and (with even more difficulty) silky Persian rugs. And since I lost my home and property in the Autumn raids of 1940, I can also resist buying books and walking-sticks, which is a bit odd from the psychological point of view, unless it is not odd at all but can be almost too simply explained: that when you have had a library of about 2000 books, most of them irreplaceable, you have *had* books and that's that. And when you have been left with absolutely no possessions except about fifty-seven walking-

sticks, you rather feel that walking-sticks can be a bit overdone and you would have preferred a more balanced state of affairs. Anyhow, and by whatever process this happens, I now go to a picture-gallery as a drunkard goes to a public-house with no intention of buying a drink.

The furthest inner room was crowded with Epstein's dahlias, a glorious medley of purples and flames, but luckily they did not attract me: "becos we are too menny"—that tragic sentence scrawled as a farewell message before the children killed themselves in "Jude the Obscure". In the outer room I hankered after a picture by Stanley Spencer of lilac and laburnums in a garden, but reason had not yet lost its sway, and muttering "I have no intention of buying this," I walked into the small room and stopped dead in front of "French Fantasy": "I have no intention of buying this either," I said, partly to myself and partly to a dark lady in opulent furs who was also looking at it, and who glancing round in surprise, at once hailed me as "Gladys". When this happens, it can only mean an old school friend who knows nothing of my later metamorphosis; and at once came that burst of eager chatter which begins always with, "How long is it? Let me see, it must be 35—40—45 years", and ends with the Literature Mistress. You might have thought that I was, therefore, safely anchored in the dear old Lower Fifth. Nevertheless, as one of the owners of the galleries hurried by, the unreclaimed drunkard who was my Mr. Hyde (whilst "Gladys" was Mr. Jekyll) called out to him: "How much is this picture?" He told me. "I'll have it," I said. A wail from my old school friend. She had been standing there for some time before I came, and was gradually intending to buy "French Fantasy". I was unrepentant; not quite heartless enough to say, "You've got a good-looking daughter and those lovely silver foxes, and you ought to have made up your mind quicker. Can't be leisurely over buying pictures."

In fact, events were moving too rapidly that morning for me to say anything at all in reply, for I was just then drawn backwards into a man's arms and warmly embraced. Ivor Novello, when he greets his friends, sees no difference between a fashionable crowded picture-gallery and his own dressing-room at the theatre. I was delighted to see Ivor, as we all are, always, and delighted to be drawn away at that rather touchy moment from my old school friend, and delighted when he told me that he had that very day bought me a present, a lovely green glass walking-stick (sub-



sequently delivered to me in Albany tenderly cradled in a gun-case of the Crimean period, and I am still wondering where he got the gun-case, and to what good use I could put it in these days of nothing wasted :) To be given a walking-stick is a wholly different matter from buying one for myself, so what with one thing and another, I swaggered out of the galleries that day feeling I had done well for myself.

Yet all my swagger was as nothing compared with the black-bearded bluejacket with fierce dark eyes and the suggestion, though naturally not the realization, of gold earrings, whom I encountered during the entr'acte that evening at my first First Night since the war began. The play was "The Petrified Forest" which I had seen twice before; years ago performed by an American small-town stock company, and then as a film. Leslie Howard's electrifying impact on the audience in a strange last act which is either everything or nonsense, must have re-infected the rest of the company every night with his unearthly lit-from-within exultation at the idea they might all die in just one more moment; I am convinced that act would never have come across, otherwise. Professionally speaking, a good actor should remain emotionally immune from what he is doing whilst he is doing it; but this was an exceptional play, and Leslie swung them along with him until they were all a little crazy and not able afterwards to say exactly why or even what it was about. Of course, it is only gracious to allow that Robert Sherwood and Humphrey Bogart may have had something to do with it; Sherwood let that fire of sudden undefinable lunacy for an encounter with death, which we find almost inevitably in the Russian dramatists and also in the last act of Shaw's "Heart-break House", occur again and again in his plays: "Reunion in Vienna", "Idiot's Delight", "The Petrified Forest", "There Shall Be No Night". Sassoon achieves it in one short poem: "Everyone suddenly burst out singing" . . . A poetic shout of jubilation and defiance and unity.

Naturally then, aware of what was coming, I was wondering during the English production whether the last act could pull me over the border-line again, as Leslie had. And wondering, found myself separated from the rest of the jocund company; lonely as a cloud. Then I crashed into the black-bearded bluejacket. His deportment was dangerous enough to make me glance uneasily over my shoulder, recalling old stories of rude and licentious soldiery, who after all might just as well be sailors with a wife in

every entr'acte . . . It did not improve matters when he hailed me familiarly by my Christian name (no, not Gladys; once in a day is enough; and this, whoever he might be, was certainly not an old school friend). At my face of bewilderment and maidenly terror, he burst into bushy, swarthy laughter . . . It was all getting much too much like a Masefield ballad of the sea. "You don't know me," he roared. "I do not," primly (if only somebody would happen along! Any Inveterate First-nighter would do; Eddie Marsh, Ivor Brown, Sibyl Colefax)—

He roared: "Benn"—[Bolt?—No, Levy].

Benn must have been looking forward for many weeks to that First Night. Several of his old friends were swooning in the stalls, having, like myself, run into him too suddenly: Benn Levy, suave, cultured, wearily ironic dramatist of the sophisticated period between two wars, possessing, I am sure, a suit of correct evening-clothes for every night of the year, Benn Levy the epicurean, the man of pavement and restaurant, Benn the subtle, the cynical, the coolly epigrammatic, the undeniably clean-shaven— This is a funny war!

I was rescued by John Gielgud (not—in fairness to Mr. Levy—that rescue was necessary), who was just off to Gibraltar with Edith Evans and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, my fellow-residents in Albany, helping to render Albany imperfect to those who remembered it by the skin of their teeth when it was still sanctuary and when the ladies, God bless 'em, were not allowed inside at all. And I described how the carrier pigeons now circled over the roof of the Mansion in their daily training manoeuvres, so that sitting up there among the broken flower-pots and soot-caked chimney-pots, you kept hearing the thrilling sound as of long streamers of silk swish through the wind, as the flying squadron rushed past and receded, wheeled and returned. Aeroplanes are beautiful to look at in movement, but their sound is mechanical, and cannot compete with pigeons in that unearthly music of silk beating against silk.

My escort and I strolled by moonlight, after the play, to the restaurant where the little wizened woman in charge of the cloak-room told me complacently that as long as she can go on making her ladies comfortable—she threw open the lavatory door and gave it the once-over for my benefit—she would always feel that she was Doing Her Bit in the war, to which the only reply is "Quaite so" and a shilling. After we had sat down, Greville

remarked that his sister was joining us, and he hoped I did not mind: I had my usual sinking reaction at the tidings, as when men say: "I want you to meet my wife", when until that moment you have no idea they had a wife. But training and good manners and Mr. Turveydrop have ordained that, "Oh, must she?" or "Must I?" should be suppressed, as nobody will care for you if you are too natural; and I was rewarded for my false and feeble: "Oh, how nice", when a really enchanting girl arrived, with the look of a Dulac Eastern princess; long dark curls, big dark eyes—too big and the shadows under them too blue and bruised; she explained, apologizing for her tumble of long curls, that she had lately been seriously ill and had not yet been able to have them cut. The child's husband was a Major in the Czecho-Slovak forces in East Anglia (Dulac in his Fairy-Tale had left out that bit). The foreign *sommelier* lingered at the table, chattering of gin and how we could not have just then our familiar brand; he was endeavouring to tell us that the best gin was kept away from the rest of us and given to the Navy Wardrooms; but so that we should not think him unpatriotic, each time he mentioned the Navy, he pattered: "It-is-right-they-are-brave-men-they-protect-us-and-I-would-not-wish-them-not-to-have-the-best-it-is-right." A second meringue appeared on my plate by no human agency ten minutes after I had timidly asked if it were against the law for me to have another, and had been told in implacable tones that the war had shuddered and nearly stopped at my mere suggestion. On my way out of the restaurant after supper, I was stopped at another table by a man whose name I cannot remember, and whom I had not seen for years; my only link with his existence was in connection with a man who had telephoned me that very morning after I had not heard from *him* for years; I could not remember his name, either. Neither was of any importance in my life, but each had separately told me that the other was "shady". That is my favourite kind of coincidence; small enough, so to speak, that you can jingle it in your pocket like small change from the day's takings; a five-centime coincidence. A brief while ago, Dido and I were discussing the Winged Victory; I believe we reached it in natural transition from Da Vinci's masterpiece in the Louvre, or it may have followed on some talk of movement in stone and marble and the warm reassurance expressed in the Angel's arms supporting Jacob after the long night struggle; and of the Barberini Faun relaxed in utter abandonment to weariness and

sleep, head hung back, one arm loosely dangling, as we had each seen him down a vista of long galleries at the Glyptothek in Munich. A statue depends so much on how and where you see it first; and so we remembered how we had first seen the Victory of Samothrace rushing down the flight of steps, the wind blowing back her draperies, the wind in her hair—you could swear to that, as though no Headsman had been at work. I recalled how I had once written a short story, now completely lost and forgotten, about an archaeologist who had fallen in love with Niké, and spent a lifetime in training and studying and then in actual search for the missing head among the Greek islands, where it was possible by a million to one chance that his search might end in success. The million to one chance happened . . . and he threw the head over the cliff to the bottom of the sea, and himself after it, for he had loved his goddess so passionately as not to mar her glory and her immortality. I was very young when I tossed off this trifle, and thought no small beer of myself for its cynical ending.

We went on talking of the Victory and how she had come to mean the figurehead of France to all of us who were lovers of France. The Winged Victory, where is she now? Still in the Louvre? Still with that impulsive forward rush through the air, strong, irresistible? Can the people of Paris bear to go and look at her without their hearts breaking, or does she mean, for them, hope in the future?

—Suddenly Dido said, "Do you know what date it is to-day, while we're talking like this?" No, I had not realized, and neither had she till then. It was the Quatorze Juillet. Another strange little five-centime coincidence, or maybe not even worth a sou; but it made us feel terribly sad again, with the swelling sadness of the slow movement in a Beethoven symphony. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité . . . To cheer her up, I showed her a match-box, red, white and blue, one of an arsenal of match-boxes prepared by America as propaganda weapons for their airmen to shower over France. It folded over with a picture of Liberty holding a lamp and the inscription "Liberté Devant Dieu", and inside was printed "Les Quatre Libertés":

Liberté de parole  
Liberté de religion  
Liberté de pensée  
Liberté corporelle.

It was all ready when somebody (at the Foreign Office perhaps)

discovered that President Roosevelt had only mentioned three liberties, not four; or if the fourth had occurred, it had sounded different in the American language from its translation into French . . . where there was every danger that "Liberté corporelle" might be misunderstood by a whole nation and signify that the President was going to do his best to encourage them to enjoy bodily licence. So the match-box idea was, a little wistfully, discarded, and the match-boxes given away as useful presents among a few favoured friends. I value mine very highly.

I shall always be a little surprised that Churchill, nearly always master of *le mot juste*, should have spoken of the voluntary sinking of the French Fleet by their Navy at Toulon as a "melancholy" episode. Tragic, yes, wasteful and too late; all these; but "melancholy" is a grey word, a bleak dank drizzling word; the French sailors had blown up their battleships rather than let them fall into Hitler's grasp; on that wind the scent of faith had blown back; we could again speak of France, saying the beloved word without feeling ashamed and incredulous.

The news from Toulon had not yet come in, on the night of November 27, 1942; that amazing November when the tide of war began to turn. Four of us were dining at Boulestin's; the basis of excuse for the small party was because our host wanted to open a magnum of very special Bordeaux, a 1911 Château Chevalier, to find out if it were still holding up; as we began the meal with oysters, we drank a white Burgundy before the claret; a 1929 Chablis le Pinet Blanc, which for some unknown reason captured my palate and my imagination more than the Château Chevalier. About that Chablis was a haunting far-away loveliness . . . Trying to be matter-of-fact and not mix it up with the old days and forlorn causes, I asked my host: "I hope they've still got plenty more in the cellar?" He replied gravely: "This is the last bottle." I said nothing, but picked up the cork and put it in my handbag. "As a souvenir?" asked Kate Mary Bruce, who with her husband made up the quartette. "No," I replied, lying glibly, "to stick between my teeth and bite hard in case of an air-raid. They say you should, and I've lost the one I had." Allied to the Château Chevalier, we had roast pheasant, choux de Bruxelles en purée, and an excellent mousse au chocolat, creamy with a crisp surface. Naturally we paused over drinking the claret while we ate the sweet, but afterwards I produced a glass jar of medlars, which I had brought along remembering that nowadays after a

sweet we could not order cheese. Our host, a sophisticated connoisseur of wine and food, had apparently never yet eaten a medlar. Surprised, I waited for his verdict. He thought nothing or less than nothing of their mysterious attraction:

"And I usually like fruit," he complained; "raspberries, gooseberries, nectarines—"

"But, my good man"—(or I may have said "My good fellow")—"you must not think of medlars as *fruit*."

"They're not vegetable; they're not nuts; what are they, then?"

I made an effort: "They mean the same as olives, only at the end of a meal."

Definition is the very devil, and how hard to explain the glamour of a medlar if you yourself have grown up with it. Medlars, mulberries, quinces, they should all three grow in the perfect garden which one has never had. Medlars, walnuts and the bouquet of wine; evening-clothes, damask and Royal Worcester and cut-glass and crystal chandeliers . . . Never medlars alone, but in complement to the bouquet of wine; their rough, husky flavour serves to bring it out like a charm. But I was alone in my championship; the others still went on saying: "But *what* is it about them?" So I quoted Rosalind and hoped for the best: "I'll graff it with you, and then I shall graff it with a medlar: then it will be the earliest fruit i' the country: for you'll be rotten e'er you be half ripe, and that's the right virtue of the medlar."

When I came home after that dinner, I heard the news of the French battleships at Toulon. Had we only known a couple of hours sooner, there would have been no irony in toasting that valiant hopeless gesture in the last bottle of Chablis le Pinet Blanc, 1929. It was a curious little counter-comment, that a bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape, 1933, which had been given to me on my fiftieth birthday, had perished when I came to open it. Nor was it corked; no reason why it should not have held up as well or better than the Chablis le Pinet Blanc, except the unreasonable, superstitious fancy that 1940 had been a bad year for France, and June 17th a bad date for a gift from France.

And at my moment of remembering this, Tiger rang up. Tiger had been my secretary for a good many years while I was still in my old quarters at Albany; often we went to the South of France together; and before that, she had lived at St. Maxime when she was secretary to Tennyson Jesse and H. M. Harwood.

Now she was a WREN; and now she wanted to talk to me about Toulon . . . We recalled, letting nostalgia rip for once, a day of light-hearted happiness we had spent at Toulon, four of us again, in April, 1938. The other two had been Humphrey and Rosemary with whom I had gone on a wine-tour through France many years before, at the time of the 1926 vintage, and then written a book about it called "Bouquet", full of immature mistakes but still holding some of the fun we had had, as a bottle of wine can hold the taste of the grape long afterwards. In 1938 we planned to go on a second wine-tour through Alsace and the Moselle country, along the Rhine and down into the Palatinate; but the Anschluss had made it inadvisable, so we went to Le Lavandou instead. Humphrey's birthday was the occasion for a day in Toulon. I forget whether we drove over or went by the absurd little railway train that dashes along the coast on a single line; and at every tiny halt with a bright fantastic name, stops by hurling itself at the platform, hitting it, rearing back, and remarking with indomitable intention to make the best of a daily job: "Tiens, les bons gens qui attendent le Train Bleu pour Toulon!"

Toulon was a good town where the spirit of celebration flourished as though it were only natural to stroll about and amuse oneself, exchanging greetings with dark French sailors, enjoying the spendthrift sun that streamed from the brilliant blue sky, and the abundant open markets and all the vivid Southern jolliness. I bought a pair of striped blue-and-red espadrilles that happy day, as well as a birthday present for Humphrey with "Toulon" on it in gilt, just as it might have been "A Present from Margate", though I doubt if Margate would have been such a riot of colour and blaze of sun. Toulon . . . Could one have foreseen the heart-breaking headline—

#### FRENCH SCUTTLE FLEET AS NAZIS SEIZE TOULON—

—Well, could one have foreseen it, what then? The question is rhetorical and silly.

But on Humphrey's birthday, all the great berths in the harbour were gay and busy. We marvelled at the sight of the ships, as landsmen do, on our way to the quayside restaurant further on and a little way outside the town where we had been specially recommended to go for a good *déjeuner*. But this particular restaurant was entertaining a wedding-party whose hilarity and music overflowed out of every window and door; they welcomed us courteously enough, intimating that our presence could only add

to the merriment, and pointing out the sailor bridegroom and the rosy brunette of his fancy (who looked like every other Toulon girl—all the girls of Toulon were brunette and handsome and no doubt betrothed to sailors), but we were not yet wholly convinced that here was room for our own celebration; nor was it right that it should play second fiddle; so we explored a little further, and down a flight of steps discovered a restaurant built out in wooden terraces over the Mediterranean, with the deep *Réserve* for langouste and homard which every French restaurant on the coast should possess. We were given a fine table on the terrace to ourselves (I expect all their regular clientèle had gone to the wedding), and Monsieur came bustling along to welcome us, almost tripping over his moustaches, for he was short and they were long. We lunched obediently according to his recommendations, which is the right thing to do if your selection committee knows its job. He gave us more of his company and conversational *spécialités* than we altogether desired, having planned this meal as a quartette, and not four of us sitting at a table and an extra one excitedly dancing beside us. Now and then he stood still and held us with the glittering eye of an *Ancien Marin* (*par Coleridge*), while he discoursed on food and drink with a passion that compared well with the pitiful lack of interest, almost one might say the hostility, snubbing the apologetic client, which they show at nearly every hotel and restaurant up and down our own island.

Indeed, there is something commendable, not mere tradesman zeal, by which a Frenchman exalts his own goods in a style lyrical, boastful, knowledgeable, and altogether uninhibited. For example, here is a letter which I once received out of the blue and on no provocation that I can remember :

Chez

RAMPONNEAU

Décembre 1928.

Le Beaujolais, ce vin est frais comme son nom.

Il est fruité, d'un beau rubis scintillant, et si plaisant à boire qu'il a été dénommé le roi des vins de table.

Voilà, cher Monsieur, le vin que nous allons grumer au déjeuner vinicole du Lundi 17 Décembre.

Nous donnerons la parole au poète du vin Maurice Désombiaux. L'entendre sera encore un charme de plus pour nous.

Ah! cher Monsieur, si, chose extraordinaire, vous connaissez un snob, ennemi du vin, amenez la Lundi 17 Décembre au RAMPONNEAU. Il entendra Désombiaux, il sera converti.



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

Avec nous il dégustera cet admirable produit de la nature qui est le Beaujolais, il nous quittera la face légèrement enluminée, mais le cœur rempli de joie et d'amour.

Rendez-vous Lundi 17 Décembre à 12 heures 30 chez Ramponneau qui vous envoie ses meilleurs compliments.

R. FRANÇOIS.

## DÉJEUNER VINICOLE

*du 17 Décembre 1928*

Les plats qui accompagneront les vins :

Filets de soles au Pouilly  
Faisans en salmis  
Pâté en croûte  
Salade  
Fromage  
Massepains de Reims  
Fruit

Les vins qui accompagneront les plats :

Beaujolais 1928	} Ces vins seront servis en pichets
Moulin à Vent rosé 1928	
Pouilly Fuisse Blanc 1928	
Fleurie 1927	
Moulin à Vent 1921	
Moulin à Vent hospices 1926	
Morgon 1915	

If only (and every true nostalgic heralds his sorrows by these words) if only I *could* spend Lundi 17 Décembre at 12 heures 30 in this agreeable fashion. Why should there be a hundred years between 1928 and 1943 ?

But I was talking of Humphrey's birthday in April, 1938, at La Source restaurant in Toulon. We began with a Chambéry vermouth and an excellent pâté maison ; some of us chose langoustes to follow, and watched them being hauled out of their tanks ; and some of us bouillabaisse, a bouillabaisse de luxe ; it had rouget in it, and oursins, moules, langoustes, *and* racasses, the queer little Mediterranean fish that must never be absent from a Provençal bouillabaisse, though no one ever seems to hail them by name. The saffron, Monsieur informed us, was fresh and not powder ; we could see the actual pistils and stamens like drowned maidens' hair. It came from Spain, he said ; it cost 450 francs a tin, he said ;

1300 francs a kilo. The saffron *must* be fresh, he declared, or the bouillabaisse is unworthy (I could not anticipate then that war's exigences would see me in the summer of 1943 munching an ersatz saffron bun in Cornwall). We were waited on by a gay little waiter who polka'd as he brought the dishes . . . No wonder, for he had just won fifty francs in a lottery, a fine way to grow rich in Toulon!

What did Monsieur recommend us to drink? I am not quite sure. I have scribbled in an old note-book "Cornas" which is, I believe, a Rhône wine, wallflower red, with a true gunflint flavour. Monsieur advised us, joking, not to be impressed by cobwebs on a bottle, for they can be too easily arranged by a host who is not "serious". He paid us a compliment: "It is the guests who make the wine," and made us laugh scornfully at his account of clients who insisted on having their Burgundy iced. His masterpiece was a subtle Alsatian Traminer of date unknown or forgotten. We must have drunk it before the bouillabaisse, and the Cornas with the main dish, probably poulet or caneton, which followed. A rather puzzling line in my note-book mentions that Humphrey "finished four glasses of red wine we had left"—good for Humphrey! But why did we leave them? Then I see that I have written 1868 Marc de Burgogne, which might account for it (I can almost hear our voices in sad protest: "Well, if I'm to keep any room for *that*, I simply can't finish *this*!") And what can I have meant by a final note: "Peppermint Get"? We cannot, surely we cannot have drunk a peppermint liqueur *after* the Marc de Burgogne? And if we had so far lapsed or been persuaded by the lottery waiter, would I have written it down afterwards in cold blood? Perhaps I just meant "Get some peppermint"? Which would understand itself.

After that, my notes run away with me, right away from that meal at Toulon, among other Rhône wines which I dimly recall we had sampled with our meals while at Le Lavandou. A Tavel 1933, rose-coloured wine which we had appreciated most fully at Tavel itself, in an arbour under a vine on that long-ago wine-tour. Another note says "Rancio, present from Monsieur, like Tokay", but no praise to follow, so probably I did not care for the Rancio. Next I have: "Monsieur places highest Châteauneuf du Pape, 1926. He bought it in barrel but the '23 was excellent, much better than the '26." Yes, it would be better; 1923 was a grand year for Burgundy, and the Rhône wines come nearest to Burgundy. I

## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

like the smaller more obscure Provençal wines, but they do not travel well, and should be drunk within view of where they are made. La Croix de Cavalaire, la Croix Rosée, better even than Château de Selle whose picturesque flask is a little *too* quaint . . . We do not have to be quaint when we are drinking wine. Yet they all need the sun and the unpretentious café or auberge and that luxurious sense of leisure and pleasure before they work their kindly spell. The little vines are capricious . . .

### THE REBELLIOUS VINE

One day, the vine  
That clomb on God's own house  
Cried, "I will not *grow*,"  
And, "I will *not* grow,"  
And, "I *will* not grow,"  
And, "I will not grow."  
So God leaned out his head,  
And said:  
"You need not," then the vine  
Fluttered its leaves, and cried to all the winds:  
"Oh, have I not permission from the Lord:  
And may I not begin to cease to grow?"  
But that wise God had pondered on the vine  
Before he made it.  
And, all the while it laboured *not* to grow,  
It grew; it grew;  
And all the time God knew.

HAROLD MONRO.

If you ask most people to define a period of individual happiness, they usually begin by mentioning a place. Somerset Maugham remarks in one of his books that he always associates happiness with the wide flowery valley of the Neckar, seen from Heidelberg. Ford Madox Hueffer in his poem "On Heaven" locates it in a little village in Provence: St. Rémy. I, too, can link Heaven to Provence. For no apparent reason, I vividly recall a moment in the ancient town of Avignon, our starting-point for the wine-tour. I was sitting with Rosemary at a table outside a little café; we sipped our *apéritif* and idly watched the pageant trooping past while we waited for Humphrey and Johnny to join us. Presently we saw them, their tall figures in bright blue shirts striped by the hot golden sun and the thick darkness under the plane-trees. As they moved towards us, I was suddenly and gratefully aware of the *fun* we were to have during the next four weeks. Happiness and light-hearted fun, loving France.

In the Mediterranean I first learnt to swim, and that was my ultimate freedom. No, I did not "learn" . . . It happened as though by a small personal miracle. I had always longed and longed to swim; when I achieved my desire, just before my fortieth year, it meant infinitely more than merely travelling through water; it meant power and coolness and an elated feeling that at last I was at home in a new element. And on a less exalted level, it meant being able to bathe like the others, those wonderful Others who appear continually all our lives; it meant the end of humiliation when I always had had to ask: "Is it in my depth?" before venturing. Probably I shall never be a surpassingly elegant and rapid swimmer; but now, instead of the desperate sensation that if I stop for one moment I sink, struggle and drown, I am confident that sea and river are kindly; they wish me well; they will buoy me up. The instinct how to do it came so swiftly, that as I remember, one moment I could not swim, and the next I could.

Two summers afterwards, I rented a charming little villa on a quiet curve of the Cap d'Antibes. It stood so near to my beloved playground and was so sheltered from the rest of the world that slipping out of bed into the unbelievably azure and golden weather, we could run down the garden path on to our own rocks and drop in without a bathing costume; revel in that miraculous bodyless feeling of cutting naked through the water; then out, put on a shirt and slacks, and breakfast on the verandah before settling down to hard work.

Often I drove over to spend a week-end with a friend, a famous writer whose white Moorish villa high on Cap Ferrat had some of the vanishing illusion and quality of Kubla Khan's Palace. During those week-ends I swam from his yacht, anchored almost out of sight of land. One could see the soft line of the Maritime Alps against the sky, and I had to murmur because I could not help it: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills . . ." and feel that thus might come my salvation.

Nevertheless, I was no mountain-man when it meant mountains without sea; mountains that had to be climbed. I liked the tinkle of mountain streams, and the roar of a waterfall and the small cold mist that came up when it struck the rock. I liked the autumn crocus and wild cyclamen that grow among mountains, and the air like wine, and the smell of very dry springy moss, and the haunting broken melody of cowbells. I was incredulous with rapture when as a child they took me to the Black Forest in South

Germany, and I discovered I could pick wild fruit, not to put on a plate like the carefully counted cherries from the wall in one's own home garden in Holland Park, London, but eat at my own will and appetite: downy raspberries, and bilberries darkly polished under their leaves, and strawberries like tiny crimson jewels.

I shall never forget, either, my first breathless vision of real mountains, very early one morning from a balcony of a hotel at Territet. I was sixteen. We had arrived in blackness the night before, and gone straight to bed. I had not really much idea of what I should see when I woke up and opened my balcony door . . . and there were the Jura mountains and the Alps, not brilliant and challenging, but a floating vision of opal and pearl rising all round the lake of Geneva in soft sunshine.

Nevertheless, for happiness give me (when again you can) a summer among many summers in the South of France. Towards evening we would drive inland up into the hills to one of those little walled Provençal villages and have supper: omelette, and fresh sardines fried, and *fromage du pays*, and *vin rosé du pays*, and fruit in abundance; sitting out of doors under a pergola by the low wall of the friendly little restaurant; a yoke of white oxen or a shepherd and his flock plodding patiently up from the valley along the winding mountain road just below; a lemon-coloured moon floating as though in mid-air, shedding its pale pure light on the islands of St. Honoré and St. Marguerite that were lightly sketched between sea and sky.

The legend runs that St. Honoré and his sister, St. Marguerite, were a deeply devoted pair who had lived on an island where now we see two islands if we gaze across from Cannes and the hills behind Cannes. Honoré went to dwell in a monastery and prepared a convent for Marguerite; she was allowed to visit him every month, and they enjoyed being together so much that presently he thought it a sin. He prayed for a miracle to save him from too much happiness: so the sea washed in and broke the island in two and thus they were separated; he told his sister that he would still visit her whenever the cherry-trees were in blossom. But St. Marguerite prayed for a counter-miracle: that the cherry-trees should blossom every month. Which, though it held less of saintliness than her brother's prayer, showed an amazing gift for swift repartee. It is delicious that her miracle should have been granted, proving clearly that Heaven has no objection whatever

## COMPASSIONATE LEAVE

to happiness which has its origin in innocent human affection. We are not told what were the brotherly comments of the austere St. Honoré when, glancing across at the other opal shape floating in the blue, he discovered (without opera-glasses) after his visit in early May, that the cherry-trees were blooming again in early June, and in July, and in August, September, October, November, and so on until May came round again. And how incredulous A. E. Housman would have been at such multiplication of his too-brief span of fifty years to see the cherry bloom. It is a legend that takes its stand on the side of happiness, and for that I love it. Most miracles do.

## CHAPTER XII

### COMPASSIONATE LEAVE

I HAVE a theory that we are apt to cry over the happiness of characters in fiction and their relief after anguish and pain, from a salty sense of contrast with our own present circumstances; we have a deep instinctive knowledge that such happiness is *right* and as life should be, with joy and freedom, home again, sudden kindness. Great longing is mixed in: here is the place we desire to reach; here is heaven, a village on a hillside in Provence, a view of a river in a flowery meadow . . . It all seems a far way off. We should be stoic over the realities of a world-war, but we may cry over the same sorrows on the printed page, *because they are not true*. Freud would call this release a form of sublimation; nobody can keep up stoicism for ever; better to break, and far better to break over a book.

It is no bad thing to realize that tears are a legitimate relief when they have nothing whatever to do with real grief. Over real grief, we have to consider decent behaviour, its effect on others, a sort of universal pride; so we simply refuse to break down over newspapers when they deal with bona fide experiences of helpless victims of the last four years, though there be matter enough and to spare. But why—I can only give my personal reactions, which are probably different for everyone—why can I release my pent-up tears in a flood over, let us say, the joyful return of Mr. March from the American Civil War, in "Little Women"? Why do

they stream down my face when Beth recovers from scarlet-fever and does not die of it? Much later on, in "Good Wives", she does die, but that has never affected me in the slightest. I have often said to myself: "I know every line of this book by heart, so as an experiment I am going to read it coldly and critically, and when I come to such and such a passage, *I am not going to cry!*"—And even then the author has always won and I do cry. I have no idea where my tear ducts are placed nor what spring has to be touched to start them off. "Sheer sentimentality", people will explain, loftily. But *does* that explain? Dickens himself, they say, was never able to read about the death of Little Nell without sobbing bitterly; and Bret Harte, who one assumes must have been fairly tough, wrote an undeniably sincere poem about a group of miners in the Klondyke sitting round the camp-fire and brushing horny hands across their eyes as one of them read aloud the book—"wherein the master had writ of Little Nell". Yet Little Nell meant nothing to my own tear ducts; she might die and die . . . Attagirl! So might Little Paul; and Little Eva, too. On the other hand, there was once a juvenile book called "Misunderstood"—I expect the older generation know it. "Misunderstood" is cynic-proof when Little Humphrey, seemingly so bold and careless and defiant, cast himself on the hearth-rug in the drawing-room under his dead mother's picture and wept and wept because everyone misunderstood him and he was alone and nobody cared.

This is probably where we pass through some mysterious process of identification and self-pity; we have all been misunderstood; we have all, metaphorically, lain face downwards on that same hearth-rug; we are a whole world of Little Humphreys—Oh, not all the time; every now and then, when we let ourselves relax; afterwards we feel better.

Yet I repeat that my own easy spring of tears is started up chiefly by books, plays and films whenever a character, after some strain of sorrow or loneliness, suspense or tyranny, suddenly regains happiness. You remember it was when Little Beth suddenly *recovered*, when Mr. March *returned*, that I could not control my emotions. In "David Copperfield" I could steel myself during David's childish despair when his mother died and he was left to Mr. Murdstone and the blacking factory, but I invariably cry at the page where the neglected little runaway is made gloriously happy when given a home with his Aunt Betsy Trotwood. In that brilliant essay on Dickens: "The Wound and the Bow", by

Edmund Wilson, we learn that the blacking-factory episode was not only true, but so agonizing that the memory of it darkened the rest of Charles Dickens's lifetime; yet it was the fiction in "David Copperfield", not the autobiography, which I found unbearably poignant.

Is the writer responsible, by some subtle trick of his trade? I doubt it, for in that case we, the readers, would obviously have to be taken by surprise, and the trick would not work on a second reading. But I never cry *once* over a book; I cry every time or never.

Another instance of this perverse functioning of my tears: I cried when I read a best-seller in America called "Flicka", about a boy on a farm who was allowed to choose his own foal to adopt and train; he chose what his family said in derision was a wrong 'un, too wild for his taming—a Little Humphrey among foals—a foal from the Waifery. I survived the heartbreak, but was drenched in tears at the triumphantly happy ending. In that old favourite: "The Wind in the Willows", I cried when Little Portly, the baby otter who had been lost, was found again cosily asleep between the hoofs of the kindly god Pan. And in "The Sword in the Stone", by T. S. White, where young Arthur, helped and encouraged by the whole invisible crowd of little voices from the animals who loved him, put out more than his own strength and succeeded where everyone else had failed to draw the magic sword from where it was tightly clasped in the stone, there too, I and many equally hardened toughs in the sophisticated literary world cried with relief and joy of knowing that he had won his kingdom.

Bambi when his loneliness and fear are at last reassured and comforted; Dumbo restored to his mother; the collection of pebbles and other oddments of rubbish beside the child's bed in Coventry Patmore's poem "The Toys";—all these are compelling tear-jerkers. The sacrifice of Sydney Carton used to overcome the stoniest resistance in a moment; in the same vein, "A Handful of Dust" by Evelyn Waugh; "The Unbearable Bassington" by Saki (killed in the last war), and a farewell letter by Robert Greene, a dissolute sixteenth-century dramatist who died of drink, have always been fatal in my case. The heroic fate of rakes and rotters can touch the hidden spring far more easily than the heroic fate of heroes; it may be a theory conveniently shaped for modern self-mockery, but it holds water; it holds



tears; perhaps we recognize deep down that the worthless are more akin to ourselves, and so gain a spark of hope for our ultimate redemption.

Reading is our escape journey with a return ticket; more than ever, nowadays, we cannot escape without that ticket. But we are granted brief spells of compassionate leave. Speaking not in diffidence nor in arrogance, but as a cosmic symptom, I find it tremendously interesting that never have I received so many letters from strangers about my books as since the outbreak of war. I refuse to call them "fan" letters, because that is a maddening word implying some personal idolatry, a desire to languish at my feet; and such a description is hard on those who write in honesty and gratitude. We are all inclined to rationalize our moods; it helps me not to rationalize if I work out the question on paper as I am doing now: is writing useless in war-time? Am I merely trying to prove it is valuable to satisfy my conscience? Are books a luxury or are they a necessity? Do they weaken our severe adhesion to the cause and encourage us to dream? I think not. Books help us to escape to a place of rest, to live sanely through hours of suspense, physical pain, exile or a lapse in faith. If reading is compassionate leave, then writing is worth while. Yet still I would have wondered if I were rationalizing, had it not been for those letters from all over the world during a world-war.

Yet as we are reading now more than ever, and the boom in books has proved it (contrasting so deliciously with the scarcity of labour and paper), let us at least escape temporarily to the place where we truthfully want to go; read for once what we really *want* to read; come clean about it. For there are all sorts of reasons and pretences why in the past we may not have been quite honest with ourselves about the books we enjoyed most: sometimes we were ashamed, we felt that they ought not to be *these* books, they ought to have been *those* books instead; not thrillers, for instance, but Masterpieces. Or we took advice from a person we admired who led us up the garden path; his, not our own. Or we were creditably anxious that our reading should do us good—(but to lose that self of ours for a little while does more good now than good itself). Finally there was the snobbery of liking only the best . . . That was us: Only The Best, in large capital letters.

I had a letter lately from John van Druten in America, who confessed (over a certain sequence of historical novels) that though he had admired them (loudly) for years and recommended

them (enthusiastically) to everyone he met, he had in point of fact never even finished the first, and went on decreasing from there, as they say in knitting. He added: "Have you any similar confessions to make?" I had. I came clean, then and for the first time, over "The Brothers Karamazov". It was in September, 1917, that I began a slogan: "Never mind about Tolstoy, never mind about Tchekov or Turgenev; Dostoievsky has given us the greatest thriller of them all!" And I spoke of it with a swagger like that, calling it a "thriller", as though pretending not to be aware that I was showing myself casually familiar with one of the aforesaid masterpieces.

Now let us get down to facts: Yes, I *did* read "The Brothers Karamazov"; I thought it very fine. It happened to be in 1917, and raid-time, and whenever *they* came over, I gently laid aside the Russian and picked up a rival volume called "The Fall and Rise of Susan Lennox" . . . There never was such a fall, and there never was such a rise! Though mind you, I still maintain that "The Brothers" was the greater book of the two. I cannot be dead sure if I finished it; I never read it again.

Other great books that I have only read once are Stendhal's "The Red and the Black", Flaubert's "Madame Bovary", and Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights". I am willing to agree, my hand on my heart, that these novels were inspired by genius and written by giants. They were just not my books. "War and Peace" I have read three times, and shall re-read presently.

Those which are supremely my books, literally my bedside books, roads of escape which are a mixture of masterpiece and a funny zigzagging personal choice, are: "Vanity Fair", "David Copperfield", all Jane Austen, H. G. Wells's "Kipps" and "Mr. Polly", Somerset Maugham's "Of Human Bondage", a volume of Elizabethan Prefaces and Dedications, Arnold Bennett's "The Old Wives' Tale", all Kenneth Grahame, "Puck of Pook's Hill" and "Rewards and Fairies", "The Diary of a Nobody", "Heartbreak House", both Alices, "The Country of the Pointed Firs" by Sara Orne Jewett, the Letters of R.L.S., the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay, Osbert Sitwell's poems: "England Reclaimed", Rebecca West's "The Strange Necessity", Sheila Kaye-Smith's "The Children's Summer", Dorothy Parker's collected short stories: "Here Lies"; all the Lucia books, all the Whiteoaks series, and "Little Women" and "Good Wives" by Louisa M. Alcott.

I hope that everyone will remember their own idiosyncrasies,

and so be lenient to my infantile form of escape when badly worried or unhappy, by picking up a book, not only suitable for children between ten and fifteen, but definitely written for readers of this age and kept on shelves apart in the libraries so that mothers and aunts and governesses might know where to look for them. It is apparently respectable from an adult point of view still to enjoy "The Wind in the Willows", "Alice in Wonderland", "Treasure Island", and other classics of childhood of which few grown-ups ever grow weary; it is *not* respectable to have received the following postcard from the Times Book Club:

9th December 1942.

DEAR MADAM,

We beg to inform you that we have received from you a copy of "Dimsie among the Prefects" which is not our property, and apparently belongs to you. We have therefore placed the book aside awaiting your instructions regarding it.

May we mention that the title of the book due for return is "Hotel Splendide".

Yours faithfully,

THE TIMES BOOK CLUB.

Yes, I know. But there you are.

Perhaps Mrs. Molesworth and E. Nesbit, Frances Hodgson Burnett or G. E. Farrow may one day be promoted among books to be read at any age as legitimate escape (I shall continue to wear my Old Farrovian Tie, in spite of the neglect that surrounds that beloved author of my childhood). Meanwhile I am afraid that stumbling excuses and quite incoherent explanations of "looking something up" or "my little god-daughter" are still needed when I am discovered with "The Phoenix and the Carpet", "Five Children and It", "The Railway Children", "The Magic City", "The House of Arden", "Harding's Luck", "Carrots", "Us", "The Tapestry Room", "The Cuckoo Clock" and "Two Little Waifs". (By the way, I was surprised to discover quite recently that Mrs. Molesworth had been writing under the name of Ennis Graham at the time of the first edition of "Carrots".)

"Kipps" and "Mr. Polly" have never failed to drive me right away from grey preoccupation. In July, 1940, on the day before I was due to have a major operation (destination unknown) I went to have tea with H. G. Wells at his house in Regent's Park, and he handed me the typescript of his new book: "All Aboard for Ararat", with the gentle warning that he was going to sit

beside me while I read it and note every laugh and particularly note where I *ought* to have laughed . . . After about four minutes of this torture I removed myself firmly to a chair among the flowers on his balcony, with the injunction not to follow me out, and never mind about tea; and there for the next two hours I escaped completely from all apprehension or even remembrance of what to-morrow was to bring. Mr. Wells was entirely satisfied with my laughter, both in its volume and frequency.

Nearly everyone whom I have heard "Talk About Books" on the wireless, when they discuss the problem of whether our present short supply of valuable paper should be wasted on bad books, has asked: "But who is to say what books are good, and what books are bad?"

This appears to me a sort of idiot tolerance. Any intelligent, broad-minded judge can divide books into good and bad, and firmly eliminate the bad. But there has been a mental confusion and a mix-up in terms; what they really should say is that we do certainly need both light and serious books, but only the good ones of each category. We should use our precious paper on good light books and good serious books, and on these alone. By "good", one naturally means good-of-its-kind, well-handled, competent, experienced (perhaps), and interesting (certainly). One does not mean "moral", for who, indeed, is to judge whether a book is moral enough to deserve publishing? An absorbing, well-written thriller should, of course, deserve its paper equally with an absorbing well-written book on warfare psychology or economics; a thriller of character; otherwise it should be thrown away, *not* snobbishly because it is "only a thriller", but ruthlessly because it is bad of its kind. A bad book on current warfare or psychology or economics, without any of the qualifications to make it of value, should be treated with the same ruthless elimination as a bad thriller or a bad love tale.

The "ah-but-who-is-to-say" men are prompted by the fear of being taken for literary snobs who might advocate only the publication of heavy books; they are never as afraid of being thought too tolerant. Therefore, consciously unscholarly, they babble in lenient phrases as though there were no such thing any more as discrimination in quality.

A large cross-section of the reading public, when I have asked them to tell me honestly what is their favourite escape by reading,

reply: "A good crime story. I can't concentrate on anything else, but a thriller gets me right away from it all for a bit." I partly share this taste, but does it not strike you, nevertheless, as a curious paradox? Thrillers, as we know, treat of corpses and murder, blood and death. And yet we read them to escape from a world of corpses and murder, blood and death. Why?

Probably because "alive" and "dead" in fiction are just words, and have nothing to do with actual life and actual death in war. They are part of a game which it amuses us to follow. They exist and yet they have no horror attached to them. Once again, as before, *they are not true*. We are absorbed, but we do not care. It's swell by me, we say, if there's a body stuck up in the chimney, giving the dining-room a sort of unhomey feeling . . .

And—here is the most significant difference—in the book we are assured of justice working out towards a nourishing ending and the villain brought to punishment.

A further subconscious satisfaction in detective stories lies in their unlikeliest coherence, revealed in that inevitable last chapter where the detective explains it all to one or two respectful friends and cronies, showing how detail had led him clue by clue and link by link to his complete and logical solution.

Scholarly old gentlemen and highbrow elderly spinsters are among the most ardent cannibals and blood-suckers in their reading; it is only just beginning *not* to surprise us when we find out by chance who are and who are not. A very ordinary-looking man in very ordinary-looking clothes with whom I shared a railway carriage about a year ago, sat absorbed in a book which certainly, according to his type, should have been "Murder Comes a Mucker". When surreptitiously (as we all do) I contrived to see the title, it was called "Colloquial Japanese".

We used to read for escape from our too quiet lives; now we read to escape awhile from our unquiet lives. Compassionate leave.

Compassion is a finer word, I think, than pity. It has a deeper note. Pity smacks of the Lady Patron of the Waifery. The last time I ever saw Stefan Zweig, which was, I believe, in 1938, he spoke of a novel he was writing, called: "Beware of Pity". It struck me as a remarkable title, packing such tortured experience into so few words. I asked if it were autobiographical, though in fiction form, about his life since he had had to leave his home in Salzburg during the pre-war persecution? To my surprise he answered that the theme of the story had nothing to do with the

war or sufferers from the war, but of happenings long before the Anschluss threatened the Austrian nation. It was a tale, nothing more. Then he added, and if you can say of a voice that it was bowed down with the burden of a heavy load, I can say it of his voice then: "Now more than ever, much more even than when I thought of it, I know that it is true, that we *must* beware of pity."

In Brazil, in the summer of 1942, he took compassionate leave of the world. Perhaps it is not a bad way to die of pity; better than to live without it; far better.

I did not know Stefan Zweig well. It may have been about ten years ago that H. G. Wells rang up to ask me to dinner to meet—the line was bad, and I had no idea who was to be the guest of honour, and could not therefore hastily send round to the Times Library to prepare myself before I went. I enquired of two other invited guests, but neither knew the name of what was, so to speak, the foundation guest. One of them hazarded that it must be somebody important because of the somebody-else-important asked to meet him. "I think he is from America," she hazarded. Luckily, for I was put next to him at dinner, I knew some of Stefan Zweig's books, and the language of his beloved Austria. Luckily, too, he had the gift of making you feel that he had known you for years, and was pleased to be with you again. He was a very gentle man; if he had a fault, I should say he lacked toughness; and toughness, especially to-day, can be good and necessary; not, of course, toughness in behaviour, but of feeling. Unfortunately there is no recipe for feeling tough.

In spite of his eager sensitive reception of all new ideas and discoveries, he had in his personality a romantic courteous quality, reminding me of a crusader, of Du Guesclin, of Don Quixote; he too spent a lifetime attacking windmills and enchanters, both awkward enemies and little difference between them. Perhaps the blind windmills got him in the end.

But he has left us a legacy, a living legacy, in the bulk of his work; a constructive wall standing solid against impermanence. I forget whether it was Somerset Maugham or Maugham quoting another critic, who once said that you can tell the amateur from the true professional, not only by the essence of his work but by the actual amount of it, showing sturdy, tireless achievement, where the amateur, however inspired, will only leave a few isolated samples.

Stefan Zweig's writing was wonderfully varied. He was a poet,

a dreamer, a romancer, a psychologist, a humanist, a traveller; in the main I should describe him as an explorer, opening up territory which has been dark before; not only an explorer geographically, like Magellan of whose life he wrote with such insight, but thrusting boldly back into history, into religion, into the strangeness of men and women. No journey was too far or too dangerous; he pushed on with that exultant feeling of certainty, of *this-is-my-line-and-I-can't-go-wrong*; writers do experience it, but much too rarely. Yet there is this curious thing about explorers, mental and physical; they do need the knowledge of a familiar home behind them where they can return in their own time; an assurance of stability somewhere. They do their best work then.

My own favourite books by Stefan Zweig are his psychological essays, especially "Mental Healers": studies of Mesmer and Mary Baker Eddy and Freud; and "Adepts in Self-Portraiture": Casanova, Stendhal and Tolstoy. These are masterly, as are his studies of Dickens, Balzac and Dostoevsky. He excelled in the subtle art of the long short story: "Amok" was beautiful and terrible. And there was a queer story about a pickpocket. I cannot remember its name, for it was in a magazine, and I have never seen it since. It started with the author sitting outside a Paris café watching people, with the feeling that he himself was invisible; and suddenly finding that the pickpocket whose activities he had been enjoying as a spectacle was watching *him*. He leaves the café and is aware of the pickpocket trailing him. Finally he joins the crowd at an auction in a public sale-room; the pickpocket edges nearer and nearer . . . puts his hand into the author's pocket and takes hold of his watch, with a touch so light that it would never have been noticed if the owner had not been waiting for it. He grasps the pickpocket's wrist. The man does not attempt to take it away, he just looks in silence. Nobody notices, because the auction is absorbing all attention. After a moment's conflict, the author releases the hand, and the pickpocket silently disappears through the crowd. The author, moved by that silent moment, reflects on the difference between the adept he watched from the café and the despairing creature whose wrist he grasped. He could not give him up to the police, for he came to the conclusion that the man in the dock is never the same man as he who commits the crime.

I am not sure if this is true: whether it be wisdom or a perilous illusion, overstraining the quality of mercy: Beware of Pity . . .

As a young writer, handsome, successful, popular, of good birth, eager for life and all it could bring him, he would hardly have believed it could he have been told that pity would in the end be his greatest enemy and bring him to his death by his own hand and will. Not failure or poverty, not ill-health, not shame or unhappiness, not loneliness or broken faith, those more powerful, more impressive enemies; but pity. Such a weak and slender foe, surely it need hardly be reckoned with at all, when buoyantly you set out on your career saying: "These are my assets and these my liabilities". Stefan's were nearly all assets. How could he have foretold, this young Austrian Fortunatus whose very first published volume of poems brought him recognition, that just because of his good fortune . . . Well, this is how it went: he was happy, he was keen, he travelled in all five continents; he was not spoilt, though he could buy mansions and castles wherever and whenever they took his fancy; not extravagantly, for he had a balanced mind; a bit restless, perhaps, until finally he settled down in a beautiful place outside Salzburg, where he could show hospitality to friends from all over the world. In a deeply interesting thesis at the Stefan Zweig Memorial Meeting in London after his death, Dr. N. spoke of this gathering avalanche of friendship. For Stefan was incurable; he could not stop what he had started. He was a drunkard for this making of friends, calling them friends, treating them as friends, most dear and intimate friends, hundreds of friends. . . . When persecution drove so many authors and artists, men of science and men of music, into exile, inevitably they turned to the very few who were already established financially and by high reputation in England and America. All through the nineteen-thirties and on into the years of crisis and war, Stefan Zweig was besieged by imploring cries for help: "You who have influence, you who are known here, you who have access to important people, you who have already made for yourself a home outside the Nazi countries, help us, for God's sake help us, help us *for pity's sake* . . ." The cry beat upon his ear; not only for money, that was probably the least of it; but he had to listen to their stories; how could he help it, this sensitive successful story-teller who lacked toughness, and who until now had never needed it? He had so many friends, so many hundreds of friends; how could they all be helped?

I was asked to make a speech at the Meeting in memory of



Stefan Zweig for his friends in England and for those who had cared for his work. I was glad, however, when the Chairman arranged for music instead of too many words on this occasion. Music, after all, is the simplest Esperanto; and the occasion struck me in itself as more poignant by what it unconsciously revealed of the meaning of loneliness and exile, than for the stated reason that had brought these men and women together; not, as the Chairman said, for mourning, but for an hour or two to remember in company. Most of them were foreigners, naturally; probably his fellow-countrymen; one had the impression that in their own land they had had, if not fame and importance, at least authority. Now for a little while again, authority was back. This is not to say that their grief for Stefan Zweig was not genuine, but the bitterest grief for them was now already a commonplace; nothing new about it; no more shock. But at this gathering at least they met, they spoke fluently, excitedly, whose tongues had been halting along on the crutches of "Please" and "Thank you" and other little copybook phrases for those who had not mercifully learnt English while they were still young. And the man to whose memory they were doing honour by their presence for this hour or two in a concert hall, he was their own man; they had a right to be here, not on sufferance or compulsion, but by their free will. In the most moving sort of way it seemed to me that I was at a party, a party that could not last long . . . And the good Stefan, who had had his eternal release, would understand surely how much this briefer release meant to some of his friends in exile, and would only be glad to have provided the excuse for it.

You cannot blame them; it was so long since they had something of their own, even if that something were no more festive than a meeting to honour the dead. Already they were feeling prouder, they could square their shoulders, move to their places with a touch of swagger, hail each other from bench to bench, asking for the latest news of escaped brother and cousin (it was understood, of course, that nobody asked for news of those who were still down among the black shades). Control could be shed for this short space of time; voices allowed to rise more loudly and cheerfully than the English might think tactful in refugees. . . .

And presently, during Dr. N.'s survey of Stefan Zweig's psychology and place in literature, I had again a misty sort of impression that for him this was no more a strange land.

Something in the way that he sat at the table on the platform, arranged his papers in front of him, leant forward . . . to address his students at the University. The respectful hush, the deliberation of his utterances—none of that nervous and apologetic: “Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking”, “I have already wearied you”, “But I must not make a long speech”, “You are not here to listen to me”; Dr. N. was used to an audience, and assumed that if they were not here to listen to him, they would not be here at all. Probably he was unconscious that he was seizing a rare opportunity which might not return for years. A lecturer in his very bones, he was hypnotically persuaded that the period of nightmare and banishment might never have been: Slowly, taking his time . . . he delivered his lecture to the students.

The deadliest of exile, I should imagine, must be that restlessness which follows from the lack of normality in one's daily life; normality and its inevitable sequence, rhythm. One's daily life would be all bits and pieces. Since the great upheaval of war throwing our regular hours and days into flying confusion as an earthquake, besides toppling whole cities into ruin, must also fling up lumps of green lawn and flower-bed from the quiet garden and send them flying, so do we now have to adapt ourselves to unceasing confusion, new places, unfamiliar objects, strange people, foreign languages. It can be done because patriotism has become urgent instead of static and taken for granted, and because of a certain exhilaration in measuring one's new adaptability.

Instead of requiring “a nice change” from humdrum routine and dullness, our main need, now, is a change from perpetual change. A few months ago I bought a picture called “Evening Walk” which attracted me in a queer sort of way, until I discovered the cause: that it symbolized normality; “Evening Walk”—even the title shows it was something quiet and pleasant that happened as a matter of course every evening: A man mooching along a road that winds downhill, in that clear dusk which comes when most of the light has been sucked from the day and there is just a faint after-reflection on the distant little group of houses round the church spire on the summit of the hill; a small shaggy white dog pattering along on top of a high green bank beside the road, just a few paces behind his master, who has half turned to look round at him, but not in the slightest degree surprised, accepting it that his dog always sprang up on to the high bank at just that point

in their evening walk; you can almost hear him say conversationally to a crony at the Inn: "Funny thing about that dog of mine. Walks at my heels the whole way, then just here always jumps up on the bank for a bit. Never known him fail. Likes it, somehow. Funny little chap." The magic, for me, lay in that "always". It was a very ordinary shape of man strolling downhill along that road, going home to the Missus and maybe to a wood fire, for it was beginning to turn cold; nothing to distinguish him from ten thousand others in England who always took their dog for a walk after work and before bed-time, at just this hour (you can see it in the picture) when the air was so very still that all sound was distinctly and separately heard; a twitter of birds, perhaps; a frog down in the marsh; a quacking or a neighing; crunch of a cart far away down the hill; the church clock whirring before it struck; a boy going by, whistling, or the man—no, I do not think he whistled, he just slouched along contentedly enough; a twig snapped sharply as the dog trod on it; that small mongrel white dog with the light no longer on his rough coat (a few moments later from the "now" when you were first looking at my picture) so that he too, like the man, finished his evening walk in the clear dark.

Over and over again I have fumbled for an explanation to those who were perplexed at my choice of this picture: "It's romantic," is all I can say; "romantic that they went for that walk always, every evening . . ."

I was in a small sailing-boat on Wroxham Broad in Norfolk. We had been racing another boat, or rather I had, for that was the first time I had been left proudly at the helm without expert direction; so I had to put into it far more strength than I knew I possessed, because the *Taki-Taku* carried more canvas than we did. The tiller kicked like mad. The snowy wave of our passage went roaring down the lee-rail. The wind stung my bare throat, arms, legs. Twenty-eight years ago.

Now there was a pause. The sun was setting in red pools and splashes between the reeds. I was hot, weary and triumphant. A huge bag of juicy whiteheart cherries lay near enough that I could dip in my hand lazily without moving. Wherever I looked I saw water shimmering in the sunset, heard water gurgling and lapping in the creeks, dripping from passing paddles. Boats along the bank were preparing for the night, hauling down their masts,

rolling up sails. A small dinghy shot across our bows; her oars creaked in the rowlocks. That was our pleasant little inn on the quay over there; we had not far to go for our supper presently. Friendly water-fowl plopped and ducked and skidded their wings along the surface. Sight faded to sound . . .

And my companion laughed and said: "You'll never be so happy again, Gladys!"

I wonder if he was right: It depends on what we mean by happiness, and what we need for it. Jane Austen in "Emma" speaks of "Mrs. Elton in all her apparatus of happiness"; her "apparatus" consisted of a large rustic bonnet and a basket for gathering strawberries; modest enough, really, but the sentence goes on: "Mrs. Elton was very ready to lead the way in gathering, accepting or talking." So we may suppose that that, too, was part of her apparatus. I almost said that true happiness needs no apparatus, but already I myself seem to have collected a sailing-boat, a Norfolk Broad, the right company, wind, sun, perfect health and a bag of whiteheart cherries, with the certainty of a cool drink presently at the inn just across the river.

No need for worry anywhere. And above all, to-morrow would be a continuation of to-day.

Yes, continuity must be an essential of happiness; and confidence that while we plan we do not plan defiantly on the perilous rim of catastrophe. If to-day were happiness but we knew to-morrow to be the end of happiness, it would be too sharply mixed with pain and suspense. Happiness, when nowadays we think of it far down and behind the arches of the last few years, may be, I believe, quite easily, quite simply defined as normality in a normal world.

I am not sure. Let me run through any twenty-four hours of life when it was going well, about six or seven years ago; in my own home in London, doing my usual things; and see whether it does indeed look like happiness, and why.

A Saturday morning towards the end of April. I am woken with the letters and a tall glass of orange-juice. An amusing mail: news of a friend arrived in London whom I had not expected so soon; a larger cheque than reasonably anticipated; a book I had keenly desired to read; a letter from an unknown correspondent who had understood what I had meant in a recently published article, understood even more than I had put down . . . Appreciation does matter, after all, though one may pretend occasionally that one only writes for the moon and Barclays Bank and posterity and

one's own self-respect. Before I have time to go through my mail in detail—I am not bothering about the papers because nothing terrible is going on anywhere and the oddments of news can wait—the telephone bell rings next to my bed. Familiarity is included in my apparatus for happiness, and this regular call at four minutes past eight is among the comfortable familiar things of my universe. It is as usual my friend John, eager to discuss with me a provocative new play which had opened last night; we had both been present but had scarcely met; you know what First Nights are! As usual, he also demanded to know what letters I had had, and told me about his, reading aloud interesting fragments; his plans for to-day—would they fit into mine? And here was an amusing story about a mutual friend; and look here, he had scrapped his idea for a third act, in spite of what I had said, and if I were to walk across the Park after tea as usual, we could fight it out at leisure.

—*As usual.* There again was the quiet magic, the open sesame, the abracadabra of happiness.

Presently Niki and I met at the breakfast-table and we laughed a great deal over tiny, almost invisible jokes . . . but they had wings. And the telephone kept on ringing, sometimes for her and sometimes for me; and we obligingly fielded and caught each other's bores as their names came through; earnestly saying: "No, I'm afraid she's *not* up yet. *Fast* asleep still. Can I give her a message?"

To be happy is to be lighthearted, and to be lighthearted is happiness. We talked nonsense at breakfast; and nonsense, if there are no sterner duties on hand, is a lovely thing. When you have lost it, you miss it more than great passion or great splendour. Yet descriptions of a lighthearted good time in biography and autobiography rarely come off; they are apt to dwindle into anecdotes; and in this they are unlike sorrow which can be described so as to make the reader feel the pain of it and suffer vicariously. When someone writes you a letter enthusiastically describing a good time, you often skip that portion, slightly irritated because you were not there, because you are not drawn into the spell, the magic circle; you wonder what it is all about, and are apt to think the writer is being trivial, silly, hilarious over nothing at all. A good time should be marked "Perishable".

It was not very long ago, two years, in fact, on the first day of summer warmth, that for a few moments Prunella and I recaptured nonsense. I had not seen her for ages. Silence and illness and the

shadow and peace and contentment, as a goblet is filled with old wine. After dinner I knew I would not read, but mooch round my book-shelves which covered the whole of one wall. Mooching round book-shelves; browsing; gloating a little; re-arranging a little; pulling out a volume and reading a little, perhaps half a page . . . A mellow pastime which cannot come to me again since the Blitz of October, 1940. I have never repented putting off a party, for truancy can figure as a small but charming contributor to lighthearted happiness. Though I have enjoyed parties they are far from essential; but pastime with good company I love, and shall until I die.

And I love going to strange places with familiar people. Strange places with strange people are to be dreaded, and equally to be dreaded the monotony of always the same place with the same companions. So Skye at Easter was perfect. Paul and John and Prunella and I knew each other well, yet none of us were related, and we were not scraping on each other's nerves. We liked the same sort of nonsense; and more or less the same sort of books; they were littered all over our private sitting-room at the inn high on the moors where the Red Burn ran down to the Loch. As Paul had brought his car, I was not forced to invent perpetual arguments why I need not go for a walk, so often the more tiresome part of a holiday. And that car took us exploring to unbelievably beautiful places with views across magical seas northwards from Aird to the Arctic Circle.

No use to talk about them now. I am trying hard not to be too homesick for Skye, for Provence and the Mediterranean, for Copenhagen, for New York and California, and for my own home with its Adams sitting-room drooping at blue dusk, with the hum and murmur of traffic far down in Piccadilly . . .

I have often mused on whether I were happier returning over and over again to a familiar place which I had loved, or starting out for a fresh place which might attract me as much or more. I think familiarity wins, by its added quality of tender recognition.

Two poets have written with the same passion of longing for this return to familiar things: Harold Monroe and Richard Spender. One calls his poem "Week End" and the other "Week End Leave". Reading them side by side, you will think: these two would have been friends. Harold Monroe died in 1932; he was over fifty. Richard Spender was twenty-one when he was killed

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in North Africa during the Libyan campaign. Here are fragments from Harold Monro's "Week End":

Contented evening; comfortable joys;  
The snoozing fire, and all the fields are still:  
Tranquil delight, no purpose and no noise—  
Unless the slow wind flowing round the hill

There's lovely conversation in this house:  
Words become princes that were slaves before.

The everlasting grass—how bright, how cool!  
The day has gone too suddenly, too soon.  
There's something white and shiny in that pool—  
Throw in a stone and you will hit the moon.  
Listen, the church bell ringing! Do not say  
We must go back tomorrow to our work.  
We'll tell them we are dead: we died today.  
We're lazy. We're too happy. We will shirk.  
We're cows. We're kettles. We'll be anything  
Except the manikins of time and fear.  
We'll start away tomorrow wandering,  
And nobody will notice in a year

Week-end is very well on Saturday:  
On Monday it's a different affair—  
A little episode, a trivial stay  
In some oblivious spot somehow, somewhere.  
On Sunday night we hardly laugh or speak:  
Week-end begins to merge itself in week.

Yet Monro could go back for other week-ends. The boy's week-end leave snatched during this war is heartbreaking:

Today I shall have time to live . . .  
I shall have time to notice how the clouds  
Build themselves up into turreted castles, fantastic beasts  
Living upon their own vast mountain range;  
I can listen to what the trees are saying,  
Sit watching the language of your hands  
Knitting, pouring tea, idly turning pages;  
I can close my eyes and drink joy from your voice;  
Walk hands in pockets, whistle in the woods,  
Throw sticks for dogs or shout confusion among rooks.  
Today I shall be a child . . .

An old tweed jacket hangs behind the door  
Smelling of heather, tobacco and burnt wood;  
Coloured ties fall sprawled across the broad mirror,  
And grey trousers loll in the deep arm-chair.

## COMPASSIONATE LEAVE

This afternoon we'll trace rabbits' paths like rail junctions,  
Mark hares moving in arcs behind the woods and hills,  
Raise a startled pheasant to go whirring  
Over the stubble like a heavy bomber.  
We'll sit on the broken stones of some old house  
Standing in its briar-invaded garden . . .

We'll have tea at an old inn  
Standing beckoning at the roadside—  
A kindly old lady, in a shawl, smiling at a gate,  
With wood fires and small square windows, bright curtains,  
And flowers in pots on window-sills.  
One more night in the careless freedom of that room.  
Perhaps we will not wake up . . .  
They have big farms in Warwickshire  
And sloping lawns,  
Gardens full of thick trees, lying stretched out  
With their green legs dabbling in the Avon.  
Perhaps next week we can go on the river,  
Or lie all night  
Amongst the clover in some Midland farm.

O God! Tomorrow I go back.

It emerges as a fact interesting to me in this scrutiny of past happiness, how my own childhood, that period of innocence and so forth, does not really provide much of it. Too many prohibitions. For instance, I was never allowed to keep a dog. After I married and lived in Italy, in a cottage on top of a hill with terraces of orange-trees and lemon-trees and fig-trees, a steep mule-track down to an incredibly violet sea, we kept seven dogs; and we could gather ripe figs that had been stroked by the sun, and eat them *after* bathing but *before* lunch, because I was now past the age of don't and mustn't. These were indolent and happy moments, better than childhood, because freer.

The coast of Cornwall has always brought me mysterious happiness. It was, in fact, "my place" all through my twenties. The world came right directly I was in Cornwall. In the coves, the sea lay like clear green glass, deepening to velvety bottle-green away towards the horizon where lay islands of purple shadow I lay and watched it; I snuffed it sensuously; I heard the crash of its orchestra swinging into the caves and lagoons, filling them, lazily swaying the seaweed, swelling back to leave them empty again. The air was sharp and salty, and the sea-thrift smelt like heaven. And I learned how to climb and balance myself in rock territory, and that, too, was being made free of a new kingdom,



not quite land and not quite sea; afterwards we could flop exhausted on the ledge of the bay window at the cottage where we used to stay in Sennen Cove, near the Land's End, and hear the boats rock in the curve of the little stone breakwater; and see fishermen haul pilchards up the beach. Laughter and good company. That was also the period when I was planning and writing my first novels, and they are mixed in with the exhilaration of the journey down by the Cornish Riviera Express. And always, then, when we had to return to London, this consoled us as nothing else could: "We shall be coming back!"—knowing exactly when; thinking nothing could stop us. Just as we could say: to-morrow we are going to do this, and to-morrow we are going to do that . . . And even when the time came for returning home, the ache of leaving it all was a luxury like thirst which could be slaked, because we had already planned when and how; it was just a question of wading through enough time till we caught up again with this-time-next-year.

So I thought. So I thought, then.

We chant a threnody for rhythm and normality, by our too mournful insistence that the war has irrevocably smashed up everything. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine, when they arrived in England after their four years of longing to come to our side literally as well as metaphorically, told me how they had been planning and planning the journey, trying to hammer out how best they could serve the cause, how adjust themselves to all exigencies mental and physical; inventing unfamiliar entertainments they could prepare, especially adapted for war conditions and war difficulties and war audiences; how they visualized coming, if necessary, not as the famous Lunts at all, thoroughbreds of the theatre, glamorous and impeccable, but on the contrary, only too feverishly anxious to learn a knockabout custard-pie turn, nay, hoofing in spangles and tights on rickety rigged-up platforms, canvas flapping and footlights guttering in a row of old bottles—

—But at this point their great friend Alexander Woollcott laid a hand on their throbbing brows. He advised them, when they were able to come to England, to plan their advent as though there were no war, as though everything were normal and serene; and say to themselves and to everyone else: "Yes, *of course* we're doing our usual season in England; why not? We did 'Caprice' in 1928, and 'Reunion in Vienna' the next time, and 'Amphytrion'

in 1937; so now we're going to do 'There Shall Be No Night' and 'The Guardsman' . . ."

And that had been the spirit of Alec himself when he last came over to see us; except that he as well as the Lunts had to acknowledge just a little difference in the actual transit; for this pampered, luxurious, self-indulgent man—(as we saw by his portrait lovingly drawn by his friends Ferber and Kaufman, in "The Man Who Came to Dinner"; the title-rôle no less lovingly played by himself in New York)—this huge bulk of a man crossed the Atlantic in the autumn of 1941, and made his little pleasure-trip in a battleship, because he had a weak heart and a sick body, and his doctors would not allow him to travel by Clipper. If we who loved him were flippant in visualizing Alec bulging and overlapping the steel stream-lined austerity of a man-of-war, we must be forgiven, for it was Alec himself who started us off with his jovial accounts of how he was hauled up and down ladders, heaved over the side into launches, swaying in mid-air, his pockets stuffed full of lipsticks for his girl-friends—Rebecca West, Sibyl Colefax, myself and many others; selecting these mementoes of the New World because he felt they would least encumber his person. It did us so much good to have him among us at that hour, especially when he avowed that he came for no sterner reason than simply to tell his friends in England that their friends in America still cared about them, and he had thought the best way of making us believe it was to come himself. We did believe it. Alec combined a dozen contradictory foibles of malice, de-bunking, vanity and irritability and a gigantic talent for not showing consideration, with this most rare delicacy which realized that we might be feeling . . . isolated on our island! And in coming to see us then, in that hour, his genius for friendship had unconsciously transcended the personal limits and expressed itself in terms of continents. Yet nothing could have seemed more normal and more reassuring than his visit: Alec had always come over in the past, at regular intervals, just to see us all; we had counted on it; so why not now?—And here he was once more to talk and eat and drink with us, to make us laugh, to make us cry . . . Make us cry as he did in the first of his four B.B.C. talks, on the Battle-hymn of the Republic. A fearless sentimentalist, he arranged for a chorus of male voices swelling and dying away in the background of his talk . . . Do you remember the concluding words: "We march to the brave music"?

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Saying goodbye to all of us, he was full of plans for his return next year, yet we could not help feeling that perhaps the strain of the journey at this time and in this fashion might not have been as good for his heart—as it was for ours.

He died in the midst of a broadcast in New York, less than three months later.

I imagine I have discovered, through all these explorings into the past, what can make me happiest. Certain good moments have been too brief and isolated; they fail in a promise of recurrence. The man in my picture *always* went on an evening walk with his dog at that time, along that English country road down the hill; always at the same place the little dog sprang up on to that high bank and pattered along for a while—then jumped down again. And I know that I love to feel that such peaceful things will continue, and happen again and again so that I can plan for them and look forward to them confidently, until happiness achieves a sort of rhythm, a beat in unison with the seasons and the tides, with birth and death and a promise of renaissance. That was happiness, and that is what we are all missing to-day; to-day and to-morrow. It may be that the day after to-morrow will bring it back.

## CHAPTER XIII

### “SALT GREEN STREAMS”

DEAR MR. WOOLLCOTT,

This is the book on which I was at work in September 1939. It is now clear to me that even if I were again to have the leisure and will to finish it, the work would be in vain, for the world in which and for which it was designed has ceased to exist.

So far as it went, this was my best writing; will you, who, in the past, have been so prodigal of encouragement, accept this fragment of what, complete, might have come within measurable distance of justifying your interest.

AN author who has revealed such out-of-the-way military ability and leadership as Major Evelyn Waugh in Commando warfare, could not be expected to continue at the same time placidly writing a piece of fiction begun just before war smashed into it;

a book under these abnormal circumstances sinks its status into a "mere book" or "what's-a-book?" So that the title of his latest publication: "Work Suspended" is wholly understandable. But surely "suspended" does not mean finally and irrevocably stopped: Surely it gives hope of continuation, later, when circumstances again make it possible: To satisfy any doubts, I looked it up in the dictionary: "To render *temporarily* inoperative." Therefore my present quarrel is not with the title of his book, nor with my disappointment that it should so far only consist of two chapters, a bitter disappointment but wholly my own affair as a reader. My quarrel is with the terms of the dedication. I have never yet heard of an author as good as Evelyn Waugh designing his work for an existing world, and arguing that if the specific world "in which and for which it was designed" should be in danger of vanishing, the work would be in vain. As though a tailor were cutting a suit to measure. One does not "design" a book for a certain world, nor a picture nor a piece of music; one has a certain compulsion—(I prefer the word "inspiration", but "compulsion" keeps my argument standing more firmly on the ground)—one has, therefore, a certain compulsion to express oneself on a certain subject in a certain way; and until that compulsion be satisfied, one should not for a single instant lift one's head from the work itself to see in what direction it might ultimately be going, nor where it would find appreciation or immortality. I must repeat that I should never dream of adopting this "stern daughter of the voice of God" attitude except to admonish, I might even say to rescue (if rescue were possible) a writer of such achievement and rare potentialities as Evelyn Waugh.

Here is an alternative dedication that we *could* have accepted:

DEAR MR. WOOLLCOTT,

This is the book on which I was at work in September 1939. It is now clear to me that I shall never finish it because—

—(drop into Field Postcard style of the last war)—

*Cross out any of these reasons which do not apply:*

I don't want to be thought out-of-date.

By the time the war is over, I shall probably be more interested in current material.

I am never going to give up soldiering.

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I have decided after the war to give myself a rest from writing and attend to my herbaceous border and keep Khaki Campbell ducks.

I'm damn well not going to be dictated to about what I write. See : I've lost the bit of paper on which I scribbled down how I was going to go on.

Somebody's pinched my fountain-pen and I'm told they can't be got any more.

I've changed completely, and mean to write a series of Second Sonnets from the Portuguese, and after that become a Brahman.

I am conscious of an intangible peripatetic discontent.

I must be free, free, free.

Any of these would be preferable in place of the reason which contains so much disrespect towards his own seriousness of motive, combined with such sinister prognostications.

The second part of his letter supports my contention by admitting frankly, and I think justifiably :

"So far as it went, this was my best writing." But if, Evelyn Waugh, this was your best writing, then this was also your most futile decision to carry it no further. "For the world in which and for which it was designed has ceased to exist"? Should circumstances allow you, when the fighting is over, to finish your best piece of writing, then it would not matter in the slightest what world was there to receive it. I could swear that an index of the past great writers of every country charted with the historical circumstances in which they wrote, would show that they did not "design" any of their work for a world lying ahead of them, immutable and unchangeable. How then can you, who write nonsense more brilliantly than any other contemporary writer, have written in this letter nonsense so lacking not only in brilliance but in the very point of nonsense : truth standing on its head so that it can be caught unawares at a surprising angle ?

For even if the world in which and for which your book was designed should cease to exist, the book itself would then all the more essentially keep its life as a period classic. And you are *par excellence* a period writer ; your period of history not yet quite "historical" because you have yourself seen and felt this world that has "ceased to exist", instead of having to rediscover it by research and archives. All worlds are in the process of ceasing to exist ; all writers can do no more than scoop up a little water in the palms of their hands and then let it run out again ; but few

have your clear, cynical, sometimes tender, often wicked, laughter-making scrutiny; your style which cuts like an icicle, but an icicle that never melts in an afterglow of sentimentality; your power to startle us into tears, not for a romantic rake, a picturesque rake, a rake making the supreme sacrifice for love, but (God knows how you do it) on behalf of a rake as rakes are in real life, worthless, awful, bogus, futile, frightened. You can create life which is swift and funny and enchanting, and then cause life to lose its life by ways of such uncompromising horror that at the shock we could cry out: "I can never forgive him!" knowing all the while that not only will we forgive, but be so deeply grateful for such authorship that while we breathe and read we must come up for more.

Come up for more? Right. We recognize that we must wait for more than these first two chapters of "Work Suspended", till the war is over. We cannot force your leisure and we cannot force your will. The author has no responsibility towards his eager loving readers, nor towards duty nor immortality nor the prestige of his country's literature; but an author on the front page of a published book, speaking formally and gravely in words of several syllables, an author sincerely and quite rightly not under-estimating in Chinese fashion—"This unworthy and dishonourable fragment")—has one responsibility only, to aim at truth. An echo of our schooldays lurks in the long fluent excuses of your dedication: "You see, Sir, I thought . . ." No, Waugh Minor, you did *not* think. If you had thought, you would have thought of something better than to state the work "would be in vain".

And if I have seemed exaggerated in praise of Evelyn Waugh, the Psalms tell us that "Praise is comely"; though the object of my eulogy and provoker of my exasperated temper, with his happy knack of pathfinding to the right words, might add that praise is also shy-making, blush-making, hot-making. These words of his invention not only had the evanescent popularity which sent them flying all over the town in a moment, but also the enduring usefulness that causes us to wonder how we could ever have done without them: Edward Lear and W. S. Gilbert were his blood-brothers in this talent, and Lewis Carroll's name leads all the rest. For pleasure and pride in seeing what a word-maker can do by effortless joie de vivre, or rather where he can get, I looked up in the Oxford Dictionary a couple of Lewis Carroll words: "chortle" and "galumphing". And there they were, complete

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with the dictionary's obeisance to their progenitor: *Chortle*: Chuckle loudly (invented by Lewis Carroll perhaps from chuckle, snort) *Galumph*: Go prancing in triumph. (Made by Lewis Carroll perhaps on gallop, triumph.)

To hunt down the pages of a dictionary in the deliberate hope of finding a strange word is hardly fair; anyone can catch a starfish by going out for it with a shrimping-net. But to open the dictionary for good solid reasons (such as how to spell onomatopoeic) and then to happen on a strange word may be allowed to count. Curious, the rules we still make for ourselves of what is fair and unfair, what counts and what does not. I was looking up "blackamoor" in connection with Othello (was it originally three separate words beginning a proverb on parallel lines with scratcharussian?). My haul that time was *Maccaboy*: "kind of snuff usually scented with attar of roses"—(For crossword education purposes, the clue would have to be slightly facetious: American slang greeting to a Scotsman? Answer: "Maccaboy!")

And here on the same page is a bit of real information about the origin of *Macabre*: "Danse macabre, dance of death; grim, gruesome. (Perhaps French corruption of macabé maccabee.)" And do you happen to know the meaning of *Lycanthropy*? No! It means the transformation of a witch into a wolf.

Onomatopoeia is not in itself a word of beauty either for the eye or for the ear. It is even more difficult to remember than "mesembryanthemum" with which I myself have never had any trouble; or hysterectomy, which, on the contrary, I can never introduce into my lighter chit-chat without hastily doing a bit of Pelmanism with "hysterical deuteronomy", and thus reaching hysterectomy round the corner. When we were at school most of us were taught onomatopoeia by:

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms  
And murmuring of innumerable bees"

and were told to moan and murmur the lines, to see how Tennyson pulled it off. Virgil, if you were on the Classics side, supplied one more onomatopoeic example:

"The sound of many a heavily galloping hoof"  
"Quadrupedumque putrem cursu quatit ungula campum".

By crossword education I was interested to discover that the author of the line: "apt alliteration's artful aid" had himself an

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alliterative name, and the surname associated with the king-conjuror of words: Charles Churchill.

It is not easy to discover whether a word has first become onomatopœic merely by association in sight and sound with the thing itself, or whether the process is reversed. "Lull" has always held for me a spell of calm . . . "During the lull" when the clatter dies down and one is able to relax . . . Lullaby, Lulworth Cove . . . I have never been to Lulworth Cove and I would rather do without a "worth" attached to the lovely lulling of little waves softly licking the pebbly line of land. I shall not go there, for I have a suspicion that the air of Lulworth Cove must be by the message of words "relaxing", not strong and stinging and salt as I like it. Rebecca West once told me I preferred air to be like a nutmeg-grater.

"Socket" is a skull word; I never use it without being forced to see a face and head sinking into bony structure. If you tell me that a man is "shady", I am not nearly as convinced that he would be the wrong person to hold my pocket-book (stuffed full of notes) as if you had warningly whispered that he was "crooked"; crooked like a frog's leg, not shady like the green sanctuary of Fontainebleau or Savernake on a glaring day. "Flat" is the flattest word I know. I am always glad that in Albany where I live, a tradition requests us not to use the word "flat", but "set of rooms" or "chambers". Flat is depressing wherever you use it; flat feet, "That's flat", "I laid him flat", "She flatly denied it", flat contradiction, flatulence, flatten the target, the key line in Kipling's hymn for the religious sect in *The Village That Voted the Earth was Flat*—

"Flat and flat for evermore".

Yet flatterer and flattery come out wrong in that conjunction; flatterers used to surround kings in order to bolster up their self-respect, not flatten it down. In the old days it appeared to be a profession in itself: "What does old So-and-so do for a living?" "He's a flatterer." "What is your son going into?" "I thought of apprenticing him to a good flatterer!" (For instance, the man who first thought of calling Louis Quatorze: *Le Roi Soleil*.) Flatterers were followed by toadies, and they in time gave way, or rather gave word to Yes-men; the yes-man of Hollywood propping up the self-esteem of celluloid royalty.

Our debt to America for word and phrase is boundless (unless



we may count Shakespeare). "Bug" is not a word for the squeamish in England, so we are liable to be a little startled at the way it is freely splurged about in America, unless we learn that over there it has somehow gone up in the world while losing some of its virility. Their "ladybug" is no more than our ladybird. This is the moment for me to explain to those who already know the poetry of Stephen Vincent Benét, that when I quote him in the first chapter of this book, I cut out the line:

"Maketh bugs come out of cracks"

as one of his delights of April, not because my innate refinement went hand in hand with Mr. Bowdler's, but simply that the visual association in England moves rapidly from bug to bugly and thence to ugly . . .

It is not only from one country to another that the same word shrinks and expands, rises and falls, hardens and softens. Take "villa". If you were told in England that a man lived in a villa in Studdington North, you would not envy him his possession, and would have no desire to go and stay with him. You would feel you might not like that man, even before you met him. But let him make careless mention of a villa in Frascati, and there you are, echoing all of Robert Browning's ecstasy.

"Margarine" is originally associated with a Greek word meaning a pearl, and was, I believe, invented during the siege of Paris in 1870; though another more personal legend relates that the Dutchman who first brought margarine into England, named it after his wife Margery. I doubt if nowadays any nostalgic butter-lover would think of either pearls or a chaste wife in association with a word that makes us at once see that sort of pale hard flaky look as the knife chips it: "It doesn't *cut* like butter." "No," we agree sadly in mournful cadences of Maeterlinckian melancholy; "because it isn't butter . . . We must have finished the butter . . . We must have finished the butter long ago . . . We must have finished it before the Old Queen died . . . We must have finished it long long before we were born . . ."

The Restoration dramatists plugged one word: cuckold. Shakespeare, though not as obsessed as they, often made merry over cuckoldry and its association of wearing horns; which has always puzzled me, for there would seem to be no modern English equivalent, similar to the yes-man descending in direct line from flatterer. A curious psychological change from period to period

shows in our present-day understanding of the word "rational", laid beside Jane Austen's perpetual praise of a rational man or woman. To her it was of the first importance that a human being should be rational, as indeed it still and always is; though after her day we ceased to extol it until psychoanalysis swung it back into daily conversation as "rationalizing", meaning a psychological movement of the subconscious to alter events and behaviour and thus make them conform with the Secret Wish. Yet I think when we say "So-and-so isn't even civilized", not meaning it literally, it works out at much the same meaning as Miss Austen's rational. Of the young men whom she condemns as "profligate", Wickham and Willoughby are the most conspicuous two, though Frank Churchill, Captain Tilney and Henry Crawford are in the same rather attractive category (at least Henry Crawford is attractive; but that point of view I have incorporated in a chapter in another book). At a later period, "profligate" and "spendthrift" became "ne'er-do-well" and "waster"; Stephen Leacock, in a jolly parody, calls him "the Roo", and for me he can never be called anything less suggestive and exciting. In the New Testament, the same cheerful careless swaggering young fellow was called a Prodigal; prodigal links itself with generous; one always somehow knows that the Prodigal was ready to stand treat, but the spendthrift would spend on himself, and not always his own money; he spends the result of other people's thrift—(see what association can do when given its head!). We are ready to ask the prodigal and the profligate to dinner, but we are not at home to the spendthrift, remembering his thrifty mother and father and how they scrimped and saved in order to send him to a good school . . .

Thrift is the least objectionable of all the money-saving words, perhaps because we like herbs in a cottage garden, whereas no charm can be linked to "pinching and scraping", to "mean" and "avaricious", to the miser ("miser" is a dreadful word; it has the smell of old mice lurking in his clothes); "niggardly" is a bad, small, cramping word; it has tiny niggardly movements turning inwards, whereas "generous" throws out largesse with a gesture. The sound association might be in the hard "g" compared with the soft "g".

And if one word can spur imagination to a gallop, there are no limits to what two consecutive words can achieve, and three, each setting light to the other. As a test, when with map and geography book you learnt in your schooldays about Central America, if you

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noticed Popocatepetl at all, it was as a long word, a silly word, difficult to spell and pronounce. Yet later on :

I walked in a great golden dream  
To and fro from school—  
Shining Popocatepetl  
The dusty streets did rule

and "Shining Popocatepetl", transformed to a flower with shining petals, was lovely ever after. Over and over again W. J. Turner reveals this gift of dabbling colour into words on his page, or it converse of draining colour away :

I saw a frieze in whitest marble drawn  
Of boys who sought for shells along the shore,  
Their white feet shedding pallor in the sea,  
The shallow sea, the spring-time sea of green  
That faintly creamed against the cold, smooth pebbles.

And for a three-word sequence, staleness can be refreshed on grey stuffy midsummer night, simply by sight of the page wit Oberon's :

"Turns into yellow gold its salt green streams".

When you join "flying" to any plain word, you can at once feel the wind rush through your hair; as a trick it is almost too easy. "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze"—he soars out of sight, and on a sudden comes swooping down again "Flying buttresses"—Architecturally it was years before exact information as to what they meant slew my hazy but glorious notion that somewhere in the wide world was a cathedral that spread its wings and flew. And "Flying Scotsman"; luckily realized from the first that this was a train and not a MacGregor a powerful express storming from King's Cross to the North. Till finally I myself went with the Flying Scotsman, and glamour still did not fade and has never faded; nor was it rivalled by the Blue Train, the Orient Express, the Golden Arrow, the Ror Express, the Hiawatha, the Twentieth Century, the Chief, nor any of these thunderbolt personalities. Fairy-tale brought us the Flying Trunk; but it was no fairy-tale that brought us the Flying Fortresses; though the first few times of seeing this strange alliance of two opposite associations, wild geese beating across the sky a gun-mounted impregnability, gave us less the feeling of the great realism of war than a childish delight that here again was magic and magic was on our side.

War is bound as a side-line to enrich our vocabulary. It also plays us odd contrasting tricks of then and now, before and to-day, once and how different. Once, "*la donna è mobile*" stood for a roystering tenor solo in Italian opera. Now its literal translation: "the woman is mobile" is a categorical label from the Ministry of Labour. *La Donna* who was mobile was an obliging *Donna*, or so the Duke suggested with a touch of lewdness; how different from the woman who (being mobile) can be directed with little consideration for the seductive aspects of her femininity, to the Services or to factories at any distance from her domicile. I wish a job could have been invented to consist of remoulding certain words which have to be used in war-time till at least they look a little nearer to the heart's desire. "Restrictions" and "Utility" are examples of such words which should never have been allowed into general use, for they have no trumpet appeal to stir the blood and rouse an ardent sense of patriotism. Words which perforce must be used over and over again in the Press or on the wireless, on posters of appeal and exhortation, need not be flamboyant and hot-making, but neither should they have a dry, cramping, threatening sound about them.

"Restriction" is a claustrophobic word; it pulls in and tightens your breathing-space. "Utility" is the quintessence of dullness; no one could conjure banners and a cheering crowd out of utility; it is so glum that even when joined to names like Molyneux and Hartnell, it remains suspect. It is a fact that thousands, when confronted with really excellent goods not lacking in beauty, have exclaimed: "Oh, no thanks, not for me; not if it's *utility*!" "Evacuee" is a brutal contemptuous word which should have been thrown into the refuse bin from the word Go. "Salvage", on the other hand, has a hint of gay rescue about it. "Call-up" is distinctly inspiring; "register" is not. I will try and believe people who tell me that their heart leaps up when they behold Woolton Pie on the menu; and if they add: "it helps the war-effort", my heart will leap up too, because *war-effort* implies collaboration, whereas Woolton Pie has a sound of more "woolly" vegetables than it deserves; if christened "Caravan Pie", we could still silently salute Lord Woolton and his spectacular achievement with every mouthful. Yesterday I was told an anecdote of an old lady who once upon a time sent a message to her grocer that he must change that last package of tea, for she wouldn't touch the wretched stuff with a barge-pole. He sent back a profound apology, saying there had

been a mistake and he had given her some from a customer's private case of Caravan tea left in store with them. The old lady at once refused to part.

Winston Churchill is the lord and king of all words grandly yet meticulously *right* in war-time. As far as I can remember, he has only slipped up once in his genius for selection, when the French sailors sank their Fleet at Toulon rather than hand it over to the enemy. That was no "melancholy" occasion. But his other phrases, how they quicken the heart; how they leapt into our mind, challenging its weariness; how they brought laughter and fun when fun and laughter were almost forgotten. In his choice of words, he is at once an aristocrat and an urchin, and we can never be sure which will come up next. It is not so very difficult, perhaps, for a fine orator to bring us triumph, exhilaration and pride, but Churchill could do all that and more; he could console and steady us when above all we needed steadying. Before Dunkirk: "I must prepare the House for hard and heavy news." Hard and heavy—not, as so many would have said instead, for "bad news" or "black news". And of victory: "Its bright gleam has touched the helmets of our soldiers"—That was a poet speaking; that was Homeric. "I can promise you nothing but blood, toil, tears and sweat." And in contrast, the gorgeous lethal derision contained in his picture of the jackal Mussolini "frisking" at Hitler's side.

Best of all for me, and when I needed it most, his words after the fall of France: "We fight alone now; we have that high honour." The miracle of his understanding, to associate "alone" with "high honour"! I think none of us, individually or as a nation, felt terrified or alone any longer, nor ever again during those twelve months when indeed we fought without allies and almost without friends. But Churchill had sounded his trumpet voluntary, and however glad we were and are and will be of help and allies, we are yet more glad that we had that high honour which but for him might have been marshes of despair. He could not have achieved it by rhetoric alone; we had to know and we did know that thus he felt about it himself, and never had it occurred to him that we could feel otherwise. A man of equal integrity but without that illuminating flash across the dark sky, might have chosen the words: "we fight alone now", but I think he would have gone on—"and we may be proud of it", instead of: "that high honour". Churchill's statement was not spoken in brass

heroics; he spoke what to him could not be otherwise than plain truth: that we were not abandoned but promoted.

And that was the end of my special and personal panic. I had not been afraid of what might happen to us; but afraid, as usual, of desolation; afraid of being Horatius, without Spurius Lartius and brave Herminius to stand on either side to keep the bridge with me. Now it did not matter any more that France had collapsed, and Russia and America were not yet in, and we had no friends and no allies. Most splendidly it did not matter—(The quaking little animals stopped quaking when Noah said: "We're all in the same ark"!) )

On the following Christmas, December, 1940, I was flung a similar life-belt in the form of a Christmas card from a friend and publisher in America. It bore two tiny little crossed flags, the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes; underneath was engraved in gold (as well it might have been)—

"A prayer

"A wish

"Greetings".

I have always liked the sort of Christmas card of two clasped hands surrounded by a wreath of forget-me-nots in celluloid, and "For Auld Lang Syne" winding in and out, and silver bells in a bunch in a corner; and this card, though artistically an aristocrat by comparison, brought the same spirit of the—Campbells—are-coming-and-what's-more-they-want-to-come, which at that moment of that year was a live reassurance and a talisman.

I have read somewhere that Winston Churchill in the wars of his youth served as "a galloper". That is the perfect word to describe him, then, now and always. His own name helps: Winston. And next to it, Churchill—a church on a hill; an English scene in English words; it can be seen from a long way off, this church on a hill; churches were always built on the highest piece of ground. And Churchill leads us back by more personal, less rural association to Marlborough, to Sarah and Randolph Churchill, victory and a flame of red hair. Millions feel like this about Churchill, millions all over the world—which is why I can quite happily relate the incident of Florrie the cook, rabid radio fan. It was on the night of one of his really great speeches, a speech for which we had all been waiting: "You're going to listen to it, aren't you, Florrie?" The answer came, a bit resigned: "I shall 'ave to, it's on both stations."

## CHAPTER XIV

## BACKWASH OF A DREAM

THIS is a true story about two very gentle old ladies, both over eighty, who dwelt in the lunatic asylum of the hospital at St. Michel. One was a nun; she adored thrillers; she was blind, so her friend, an unselfish soul, read them aloud to her, but as she could not bear to utter dreadful words like "corpse" and "blood", whenever she came to them in the text she always substituted beautiful tender words, like "violets" for "corpse", and "moonlight" for "blood". It must have been a little muddling for her grateful and attentive listener to hear that there was moonlight all over the violets, when she was longing to hear of the exact condition and decomposition of the dismembered body inadequately wrapped in stained newspaper and stuffed inside the piano where the inside had been wrenched out to make room for it. Muddling, certainly; but the gentle little octogenarian reading aloud to her friend the nun, in their nightmare retreat, cannot have been aware that by her hypersensitive substitution she was subtly adding horror instead of subtracting it; the same faint horror that steals over us in a dream when we are not sure why, because nothing has happened . . . And when we wake up, still nothing has "happened"; still we have not seen the dismembered corpse in the piano. Only the moonlight on the violets.

What Freud has analysed as an "anxiety dream", lands us, on the contrary, slap in the middle of some ghastly predicament: One is late and has to catch a train, with none of the packing done; one finds oneself being married and only the upper part of one's dress on; in half a minute one has to walk on to the stage not knowing a single line of one's part . . . It is curious that in these anxiety dreams we do not dream the start of our troubles, nor how we ever came to be in such a terrible situation; we are always *there* at the very heart of it, too late to do anything to save ourselves; helpless and unresourceful, our dream selves lacking the mind which awake would get us out of the trouble, or the poise which would enable us to laugh it off.

Those I have mentioned are the most common of the anxiety dreams; I might add some people's recurring dream of being sent

back to school when they are already adult, married, mature, divorced. I have never dreamt this myself; I suppose it has not presented itself down the area steps of my subconscious; anxiety dreams take a turn or two away from the actual stuff of worry in our waking lives, but they can usually be traced back, so it may be that I should quite enjoy going to school again, a fugitive from responsibility. It would tie up with my secret (not so secret now) vice for reading girls' school stories as a form of escape. The trunks-not-yet-packed dream, and madly trying to read over my part from a blurred page before the cue is spoken, those are the specialities sent up from my basement kitchen. The dream wedding of a thousand catastrophes was exquisitely presented to us in a Reinhardt play: "A Venetian Night"; in Kaufman and Connelly's "Beggar on Horseback"; and in a musical play with Dorothy Dickson in the title rôle, called "Peggy Ann".

Anxiety dreams gather thick round every bed in war-time. They sound trivial enough when we wake up and try boringly to describe them: "Well you see, there I was, and they kept on coming in, and then I looked down and I saw I hadn't got anything on, but they didn't seem to notice, and there was a man, I don't know what he was doing, he wasn't the clergyman, and Harry was there too, and I knew we shouldn't be able to catch the boat unless we started at once, and I kept on telling them but I couldn't make them hear . . ."

I am not sure whether I would rather sleep with anxiety dreams or try to grapple with insomnia. In both, you lose your sense of proportion, but perhaps it is less frightening to be asleep and lose it, than broad awake. Present-day insomnia is a particularly virulent type; it may begin on a fairly low level by merely worrying over your points and coupons and trying to count up how many are left and on what date they expire, but it can swell and swell until the night is an unexpurgated collection of illustrations in the Doré style of Purgatory and Hell.

I used to have a little pre-war panacea for insomnia; a variation on the sheep-counting theme: I counted my friends. That was not quite as quickly over as you might suppose; there were all sorts of self-made but inviolable rules; I might not count husbands or wives who gate-crashed into my list only through marriage; friends-in-law, in fact; it was interesting to discover who, by this method, had legitimized themselves in my affections, and who, on the honesty clause, I had to throw out. Acquaintances could



not be counted, even if they had had a meal, a square meal, under my roof. Yet there might be somebody who quietly stepped out from memory and took his place in the catalogue of my friends, and yet until that night's insomnia I had never known it. And what about those former friends with whom you had quarrelled and now never saw? Awkward; you had to make up your mind if you genuinely hoped they would return into your life (in which case you might count them) or if they were a dead loss? Freud would be interested by the order of precedence dictated by your subconscious; often a most intimate friend would not turn up till you had reached the sixties or seventies in your list; the first dozen were invariably made up of the make-weights or the Doubtful-Exotics. Ninety-three, ninety-four . . . a bit of cheating here, for you *so* wanted to bring it up to a hundred—(What, aren't you asleep yet, after all that counting? No, never been wider awake!)—Yes, you have to bring it up to a hundred! *Too* poverty-stricken, with only ninety-seven friends. Well then, at all costs think of three more . . . Cheat; cram in that woman who was so awfully nice that time in the wagon-restaurant; after all, you did share a table, and she said she'd ring you up; she *may* have tried, she may still try. And then there's Mr. Potter; he's a friend really—no, wait a moment, *is* his name Potter? I'll swear it began with a "P". Dawkins, that's it; Dawkins. Satisfied, you murmur into the dark: "I have a hundred friends!" . . . And only a slight inner discontent reminds you that when you did this a fortnight ago, they mounted up to a hundred and seventeen. So *why* did you have seventeen more friends then than now?

Sometimes I used to be able to send myself to sleep by repeating Tennyson's "Revenge", dropping off somewhere in the last verse when fifty-three battleships of the Spanish Fleet sank our one little ship after a fight that had lasted from star-shine to sun-rise. At a luncheon-party given by Mr. Somerset Maugham, a guest happened to mention the Azores, and Mr. Maugham ruminatingly quoted the first line of the poem. In the reverent pause that followed, I remarked: "I can recite the *whole* of the 'Revenge' by heart." Mr. Maugham decided to call my bluff: "Say the next three lines," he rapped out. In a tone of mild surprise, but only anxious to oblige, I did supply the next three lines:

"And a pinnacle like a fluttered bird came flying from far away:

'Spanish ships of war at sea,  
'We have sighted fifty-three'—"

and punctiliously stopped, with eyes fixed hopefully on Mr. Maugham, hoping that the Master would say: "Dear Miss Stern, pray let us hear the rest of it; there will be just time before the soufflé"—(though there should never be time before a soufflé). But he merely said courteously and with deep feeling: "Thank you *very* much indeed," and the incident was closed.

There is always something strangely moving about a combat between the weak and the strong, when the weak just manage to hold out. Jacob wrestling with the Angel. Monsieur Séguin's little goat in Daudet's story . . . "Qui se combatta toute la nuit contre le loup, et le matin le loup la mangea." Sir Richard Grenville and the *Revenge* in combat with King Philip's whole Armada. The same thrill was renewed in the gallantry of the *Jervis Bay* on November 25th, 1940.

Insomnia has had a topical revival, responding powerfully to every suggestion weaving through the air, that one *must* go to sleep or one will be no good in the morning for all which has to be done and endured and fought, to help bring the war to an end. This suggestion is, as we know, second to none as an ally to stark wakefulness. What are the remedies, other than becoming a drug fiend? You softly turn on your bedside wireless . . . A voice used to say from Radio Normandie at certain times of the night, that it was going to give you a special lullaby programme. I can well imagine why a voice from Radio Normandie does not still announce lullaby programmes . . . but it was no compensation, when absently fumbling for this "faire dodo" of bygone nights, I hit on a German station playing Gilbert and Sullivan: "The Gondoliers"—they took a pair of sparkling eyes in German . . . This is a funny war! Quickly and crossly you switch it off again . . . *Your* eyes are not sparkling, because they are filled with a mixture of sand laced with mustard. You listen to the clock ticking. There are two Schools over the matter of clocks in a bedroom; half the world complains that it keeps them awake, and the other half argues: "But a clock is such cheerful company!" So it's cheerful company, is it? I am of the first school, and I simply can't understand how that damned clock got upstairs and into my bedroom; it had never been there before to-night. Grunting and muttering I get up, wrap it untenderly in an old woollen cardigan, put it at the bottom of the wardrobe, and stuff a cushion over its head with the same relish as First and Second Murderer stifling the tick out of the Little Princes.

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Clamber back into bed . . . Your thoughts get large and hot, and the room inside your head is steamy like a laundry. Songs run round in it, revolving among your thoughts, persistently plugging their foolish choruses. You begin to say piteously: "Here am I awake in the middle of the night and how sorry everyone would be for me if they knew"—Then a slight variation: "Nobody would care even if they did know!" Sobs. Awake in the middle of the night, and Big Ben (when the wind is in that quarter) booms out three strokes. Well, that is the middle of the night. Soon it will be dawn, and then all hope of a good night's sleep will be over . . .

At three o'clock in the morning if you  
open your window and listen  
You will hear the feet of the wind that  
is going to call the sun,  
And the trees in the darkness rustle,  
And the trees in the moonlight glisten,  
And though it is deep dark night, you  
know that the night is done.

This is the same Kipling, sensitive, imaginative, who wrote "The Road Through the Woods". Yes, but he ought to have left out that line about the wind having feet and going to call the sun. I don't see why I shouldn't snarl and cavil if they're so beastly as to let me be awake at three o'clock in the morning. Swop Kipling for Flecker—

. . . The hour when lilies open on the lawn,  
The hour when grey wings pass beyond the mountains,  
The hour of silence when you hear the fountains,  
The hour when dreams grow brighter and winds colder—

—Stop there. I'm not going to have any young love waking on a white shoulder while I'm lying here by myself and can't get to sleep. And why lilies on the *lawn*? It took three hundred years to roll the lawns at Oxford. And why lilies growing out of the Battersea Power Station? Don't argue, they *did*; the picture was in the Academy this year; it hasn't spoilt lilies for me, but it *has* spoilt the Power Station; I can never see it now without it looking like a vase. Who says Tennyson is a pompous old Victorian Has-been?—(I *will* be truculent if I want to, at half-past three in the middle of the night!) Sometimes he has the whole lot of them licked:

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Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns  
The earliest pipe of half-awaker.'d birds  
To dying ears when unto dying eyes  
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square—

I might be dying for all anyone cares. I'd like to go and tell someone, but you can't wake people in the middle of the night, not unless you're a monster, whether they're in the same room or downstairs; there's something *about* sleep . . . and to wake a person asleep, unless they have to go on duty or unless the house is on fire (quite a calm probability nowadays) is the same sort of crime as murder, though of course not quite so final. That's why, when I ring up somebody too what-they-call-early and what I call "a reasonable hour in the morning", and I can tell by their startled husky voices that they had been still asleep, I put back the receiver terribly softly and tiptoe away. Perhaps the tiptoeing is a little silly, but I can't help it.

Bed. Bed at 3.35 a.m. A tumbled red-hot bed. Bed of the Fakir's Honeymoon—did you see that drawing in the *New Yorker*? The Fakir with an encouraging smile was indicating their bridal bed to his shy little wife. It was nicely prepared with drawing-pins and tintacks pointing upwards. Her expression showed clearly what was passing through her mind: "I wish you'd mentioned this *before* we were married, instead of directly after" . . . I can't be sure whether her oriental upbringing allowed her actually to say it. And that's the sort of bed I'm cuddling down on now, thinking sweet brave thoughts . . . What do we do with them, these thoughts? No use for salvage. Like when they cut hair; there it lies all over the floor, excellent hair, *your* hair, and apparently, though they can use chewed old bones and filthy old wire saucepan-cleaners and decayed rubber balls, my beautiful, *beautiful* hair lying in chunks and gobbets all over the lino, can only be used to string harps; fat lot of use in war-time, except for Tara's Halls.

Worst thought of all: Injustice. The thought that keeps on struggling to come back, the thought that you put out of the window, so to speak, and it pops in again through the door—shall I tell you what else it is? It's a Bore. Sometimes you can wear out the Bore-thought by just thinking it, thinking it endlessly, not only three times over; you can worry it, treat it like a football, dribble it down the field, till at last you get in a rage and manage to sling it out because it is such a bore and you don't see why you need take up with it and walk out with it for more than two and

a half hours, not to please anyone. Throw it away like worn-out chewing-gum. Take a pair of sparkling eyes instead.

Injustice . . . (here we are again). Everybody's unjust. That woman who said to you in October, 1940, when you went into the country because you'd just had an operation and your London home had been entirely destroyed—"Well of course, if you're *afraid* of bombs"—

Yes, but why argue it out with her now, when it's 1943 and you're back in London anyway? Yes, but it was so damned unjust. I can forgive—no, forget; forgive is a feeble word—I can forget Hitler setting fire to my home (though forgetting little else of his pretty ways) much more easily. Because she was my *friend* and he wasn't (the last three words could be cut, and save print and paper). Why should she get away with it? "Hatred is like a boomerang"—just one of the things that people say. It isn't a boomerang. I wish I could send a boomerang out of my window, and then not back again into my window but into hers. Yes, but then it wouldn't be a boomerang. Yes it would, if I say so; I mean if I threw it. She deserves it. How *dare* she say that to me:—"If you're afraid of boomerangs"—I mean bombs, when I couldn't stand and so was useless for anything but my own job, and more than a liability in the danger zone just then, and had to earn enough to pay my debts, and couldn't do it in a smoke-blackened ruin . . . I shall never forget it. Let her know that I'm lying here awake at twenty to four a.m. passionately never forgetting it. Injustice!

Another bogey: the future. Full of phoney tricks, the future is. Comes towards you veiled and all that . . . Dunnio who it thinks it is—a bride? Tear away the veil and let's have a look at it. So you're the Future, are you? And you've a fifty per cent. chance of being better than the present, have you? And a hundred per cent. chance of being worse. But not even a one per cent. chance of being exactly the same.

Thump the pillows—at least we needn't stand any nonsense from pillows.

In case it has occurred by now to a Dorothy Parker fan that I have been writing a Dorothy Parker insomnia, this may be perhaps the place to say in terms of steady admiration that no one can write like Dorothy Parker; but that nevertheless as this is a bit too like Dorothy Parker, I had better call it a Dorothy Parker

pastiche and hope for the best. Also I will thank Miss Parker to send me a copy of her collection of short stories called "Here Lies" directly someone else who has read this tells her she's in a printed book. Sending it will not perceptibly hinder the war-effort. Yes, but if everybody argued like that. Yes, but I possessed three separate copies and the Poltergeist has had them one after another, and now I'm without any and that's why I have to write them myself.

DEAR DOTTY,

That lovable old cynic La Rochefoucauld would say that usually we praise only to be praised, and that too great haste to repay an obligation is a kind of ingratitude. But don't worry about that. And wasn't it La Rochefoucauld, that lovable old cynic, who said that in the adversity of our best friends we often find something that is not exactly displeasing? So I suppose you're not exactly displeased that I lie here without a "Here Lies" to my name at five minutes to four on a beastly morning. But all the same I think you might do something about it, because of the Elsie books, and because we met at Edna Ferber's dinner-party and I tried to eat her lace-and-satin doily. We have all sufficient strength to endure the misfortunes of others, said La Rochefoucauld, and I'm not sure that it wasn't La Rochefoucauld who said that we're never so happy or so unhappy as we imagine (what a lovable old cynic he was!). Silence, Dotty dear, is the best resolve for him who distrusts himself (La Rochefoucauld, duc de la) so I'll just apologize for having borrowed your peerless idiom, for though we always like those who admire us we do not always like those whom we admire (Sentences and Moral Maxims, la Rochefoucauld). And be sure that whatever oceans may part us, I shall always both like and admire you until the cows come home. They're coming home pretty fast just now.

Yours ever,

PETER.

On the further side of the worst anxiety keeping you from sleep, can sometimes be found a mood of frayed-out but peaceful acceptance, which admits that terrible things may happen, your most nightmare fears be realized. Then the great swollen bladder of disproportion will give up its air, dwindle and shrink and keep you awake no longer. Unfortunately the worst thought of all, during insomnia, is nothing more definite than insomnia itself: the dread that on this night of all others, this hour before the dawn, you have for ever lost the knack of going to sleep, with no guarantee from anywhere that you will ever recover it again.

Sleep lies down those two long shining parallel lines, but just beyond vanishing point. That is the worst thought; the thought that deserves murder. You may not be fit to murder it till the day-time. Wait until you are feeling quite ordinary and amused, in your normal day-time stride, and then suddenly come up behind it and catch it unawares.

Horror of lying awake can be matched by horror of being asleep and dreaming, and unable to stop dreaming even when you wake up. This happened to me early in 1940, dabbled with fever and the heavy drug they were giving me in the nursing-home. I dreamt that cohorts of Roman soldiers were rising up out of the floor by the fireplace, and silently marching. And then it was out of doors, and I was lying on the ground, and they were still marching and still silent; presently joined by marching phalanxes who were not soldiers, but the whole of the rest of the universe. They marched and they were silent . . . and I knew beyond any doubt whatever that they were the soundless vanguard, and that a sentence of silence was on its way and would irrevocably overwhelm and end the world. While there was time and only just time, the human race *must* be warned. I lay on the ground, clammy and sweating with the urgency of what I had to do because I alone *knew*. And I managed to wrench myself awake, but still without any release from panic and urgency. Though the Roman soldiers had gone, I lay in dream-thickness and wildly tried to pierce it and get to those who were not aware that Silence was coming. Presently my night-nurse fetched one of the doctors, and I told him about it, and begged and prayed him to realize that it was true, that it was going to happen, that it was the most horrible doom on the world . . . we should have no more voices, we should not be able to speak. It was true, not a dream. I *knew*.

The thing would not fade as dreams should; it was made of something obstinate and insoluble; I am not sure if it has altogether faded yet.

Once I had a triple dream which was really rather fun. I began by dreaming that I must remember to write and ask Clifton Fadiman for permission to quote a paragraph from one of his reviews, in the book "Talking of Jane Austen" which I had just begun writing with Sheila Kaye-Smith (as a matter of fact, I have not yet asked him, and I hope he will accept my apology in case I go on postponing it till after publication). In my dream I went over to the States and intercepted him at the foot of a great marble

staircase, and noticed with compassion that he had a false nose, an extra thin grotesque nose jutting out from the end of his normal nose. But tactfully remembering Cyrano, I said nothing about it. We all laughed—I don't know who "all" was—when I remarked how I thought the quickest way to ask his permission was just to drop in!

—And waking up and falling asleep again, in a second dream I was telling someone about this first dream; excited and interested to find how completely it disproved what I had once read "somewhere in Huxley" (Aldous), that you can have no sense of humour in a dream; so that my genuine amusement over what I had said about "dropping in to ask" when the drop was from England to America in war-time (which still seemed funny in this second dream when I thought I was awake) was a valuable discovery, proving Aldous Huxley wrong; it should be placed on the records of psychological research.

—I woke up again and told myself that I really must remember, in the morning, to scribble a note of this odd double dream. I read a bit, and hearing voices in my sister's room next door, wondered whether the dog was ill and went in to visit her, which the dog thought a fine cheerful idea, and me a fine cheerful person uninhibited by the usual notions that 2 a.m. was not getting-up time. Then I returned to bed, and after an interval fell asleep.

In my third dream I dreamt I was awake at last, and in the courtyard of Albany with my friends the Vernons; and Olive Wadsley arrived looking very thin and ill; so we had deck-chairs brought out, and I told them about my two consecutive dreams, and how curious it was that in my second dream, when I dreamt I was awake, I should still have gone on thinking that my remark in the first dream, about dropping in to America, was genuinely humorous; whereas now that I was *really* awake, it hardly seemed funny at all. I added that I did not believe I *had* read in Huxley that it was impossible to have a sense of humour in dreams, but somewhere else, more recently.

. . . Then this third dream turned into the usual wumble of anxieties and lost handbags and my last cook but two spring-cleaning my rooms when I had hoped to show them looking nice to the Vernons—

Till I woke up. I suppose I *am* awake now. But you know what the Red King said.



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

This had been a conceited triple-dream, about witty remarks and valuable contributions and all that, bearing out my theory that usually when one is conceited in a dream, one is very conceited indeed. On the night of January 7th, 1943, I dreamt I was staying in a house where American boys and girls had a sort of "Day" for me, and sent masses of flowers (mainly orchids) and filled all the vases and gave me a cheque and tiny gilt-edged visiting-cards with their names on and went without shoes to do so. And I woke up awfully happy that they should like me so much.

To dream that you are flying is a sort of conceit made bodiless; you have no faults and no responsibilities and no gravity (Newton's). The phrase "she's getting above herself" deliciously expresses the sensation. Dream interpretation and psychoanalysis quote this as a universal wish-fulfilment dream; it is a part of fable and legend and fairy-tale and myth. Peter Pan could fly because he refused to grow up; but the children of the Darling family at first could not rise from their beds without flopping back again, till he gave them the trick of it. Bishop Beeching wrote:

God who created me  
Nimble and light of limb  
In three elements free,  
To run, to ride, to swim—

In *three* elements—earth, air and water; so he imagined riding as freedom of the air? Curious that in our scientific twentieth-century pride, thinking that now we can more truthfully alter it to:

In three elements free,  
To run, to *fly*, to swim—

we are liable to forget that still, except only in our dreams, we have not discovered the way of a bird through the air; still we sit with gravity the winner, and all we have learnt is how to make machines that will raise and carry us while we sit; still the boy in his Spitfire is vulnerable, a slave to the law. He has achieved his aeroplane; Icarus put on wings of wax; but neither can fly as the dreamer lifted exultantly by the very knowledge and impulse in his bones.

I dreamt about a village called "Helping", and I can remember no more about it than that. It lags behind memory like one of those scribbled notes we find long afterwards, tantalizing and full

of charm, but with all context and sense drained away. Memory is not a batman but a Gremlin.

"Delegated authority is like water in a shallow saucer"—This analect might have been gleaned from that lovable old sage Confucius, but was actually rescued by myself from the strong backwash of a dream.

Here is a further page of my old rough notes, their occasion and meaning both totally forgotten. They are headed "Notes for lecture"; objective research testifies that they cannot date back further than nine years:

Irrelevant—finest doodles—ambitions for career.

Laying a foundation stone—In a sense, this is. Should be no frontiers and passports in art. Time that you'll get on in England jingle were disapproved. This is a good time to disprove it.

Mention design showing love-birds and elephants. Not, perhaps, the swagger in French or Italian but (praise). Rebecca's dress.

Safer not to go into technicalities. Sheila and Isle of Wight disease.

Design looking good on you depends a lot on Bintem the Bathroom (enlarge).

Lots more and finish: But perhaps I was only meant to speak a few words; perhaps I was merely meant to say: "I declare this ex open".

"Bintem the Bathroom" ought surely to sound a chord somewhere. Yet I have no more idea than yourself who was this Bintem on whom "design looking good" depended (enlarge). The confusion must have been due to typist's errata; I cannot have drowned old Bintem the Persian in such a deep amnesian well.

Ransacking more note-books, I have retrieved this example of impromptu eloquence, headed simply "Speech":

"Thank them for asking me to be a guest at there (sic) party. More popular at parties, perhaps than when a child (describe)—story of my life—all or nothing—or love of *New York*: (Reading a pernicious habit! Buda-Pest.) Having said so much about place you live, describe place I live (*Albany*). End on fallacy about spontaneous waterfall eloquence, and story about *Einstein*."

I suppose the underlined represented key-words, though it makes it look like an extract of a letter from the late Queen Victoria;

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while the sentiments recall that epistle thanking a nobleman from Harry Graham's "Perfect Gentleman":

MY LORD,

Thank you a thousand times. Thanks, and again thanks.  
Your obedient servant,

WILFRED SCOTTER.

P.S.—Many thanks.

I have selected the next two notes at random, for their brevity no less than for their obscure hints at family devotion:

Theory of the Couvade—the father who suffers pain at birth of child. Analogy of method of sea-horses.

Dry fever—flat as enamel compared with rocking jollity of Phyllis and her cradle.

Stories and titles and names for stories in their earliest rough-note stage have an undeniable dream-like quality. The mists that float about them in filmy scarves of grey, lift for an instant—

Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then  
Round the half-glimpsed turrets, slowly wash again.

Title: *It's Really the Cows*. No difficulty in associating this with a faintly exasperated reflection on double summer-time. We can all recognize the invariable answer to our question as to *why* we should be robbed of that lovely gift of a daylight hour long before we are ready to yield it to the marching dark: "Well, you see," the Better-informed offer in eager but stumbling explanation, "it's really the cows." One day I shall write this article; I have much to say about my own point of view versus the cows. We must all be adaptable in war-time, but who and what are the cows that they should be so fussy?

Title: *A Bee-line for your Nuque*. Madame's hair was swept up at the back and piled high, and Madame had exquisite little tendrils to tantalize the Frenchman (Old School) into forgetting that Monsieur le Mari might return at any moment.

Title: *Fatty in Brackets*. Story about an In Memoriam notice seen in *The Times*: "My dearly loved husband Aubrey Edward Robinson ('Fatty') who departed this life still honoured and never forgotten." The story would concern itself with Aubrey Edward's point of view while he was still alive, about that affectionate nickname from which his dear ones would not release him even after death.

Title: *I Miss my Sisters*. Impoverished French family; mousy wistful little Marquis and three ugly but lively and independent younger sisters. Marquis marries a dominating American woman and settles in New York. She dies, yet he remains resident there. Pleasant circle of friends, circumstances of great comfort, but frequently laments how he misses those amiable adoring slaves, his sisters, who have stayed on in the Château; and how lonely he is and how homesick . . . "Ah, la nostalgie!" etc. His friends wonder (a) why he never mentions that he misses his wife? (b) why he doesn't go back to France? Twenty years later, subtract twenty from 1939, means he married and left France in 1919, means he has not seen his sisters for twenty years. The war. German occupation of France. Sisters get away and turn up in New York as refugees. End with twist showing title bitterly ironic. Final tableau, death of little Marquis, worn out. Sisters at bedside.

And here, at greater length in my rough note-book, is the account of an experience of my own which I thought might one day work up into quite an effective story. As it happens, it is infused with that strangeness and irrelevance, links lost between motive and action, which we lazily comprehend in the word "dreamlike". That is why I shall tell it as though I were striving to remember a dream slipping away like water down the waste; the characters inconsequent in their exits and their entrances, unreal in their behaviour.

We were on our way to Norwich first, and the Broads afterwards. The Maitlands, Sylvia and Lionel, had already met Jennie once or twice, but not Orlando, and it was their suggestion we should stop for drinks at Felicia's where they would be staying; High Larling wasn't more than eight or nine miles out of our way, just over the border into Suffolk. "What time, roughly, shall I tell them to expect us?" Jennie thought about six, as we weren't leaving London till after lunch; so I telephoned Sylvia Maitland, and she said enthusiastically that six o'clock would be simply lovely, and that she was dying to meet Orlando, not so much because he was a famous poet but because everything she had heard about him was so exciting. She was sure he'd love Felicia's house, and she was sure that he and Lionel would hit it off terribly well. Then, too, it would be so good for Felicia . . .

I was rather puzzled; why should a visit from Orlando be so

good for Felicia? "Oh, well, you see"—Sylvia sounded a bit vague and bothered—"it'll take her right out of herself. She's being so pestered by her bank and those awful mortgage people and the lawyers always writing, and you know what Felicia is!"

I did know what she was; she was intoxicating, and, it must be admitted, fairly often intoxicated—which was not so good. She lived in one lovely house after another as though she were rich, but then something always happened, and we were told "Oh, didn't you know? Felicia isn't living there any longer..." I suppose that was why she knew such a lot about houses; her friends used to say: "Darling Felicia, she's mad on architecture; you wouldn't think so to look at her, would you?" She was, in fact, a character out of any Evelyn Waugh novel, or a feminine reincarnation of Saki's Unbearable Bassington. How often I've heard Sylvia and Lionel, or whoever happened to be left holding the baby for the moment, say: "No good, my dear, I give it up. I simply can't *do* Felicia any longer. Of course she's divine and I'm terribly fond of her, but she's utterly hopeless."

We left London an hour or two earlier than we meant, so that it was barely five when we turned off the main road to High Larking. For the last twenty-five minutes of the run, Orlando had been monotonously declaiming on the theme: "I want a drink". Each time we passed a good-looking pub, he moaned a little. There are so many good-looking pubs in Suffolk. Once, even, he tried to make us stop by affected motives of delicacy and consideration for the unknown Felicia: "You say she's always on the verge of bankruptcy, so ought we to go and lap up her drinks? I mean—" "Come off it," Jennie advised him; "people who are hard-up on a huge grandiloquent scale like that, are just the people where one needn't mind. Everybody goes and drinks with them, always. When they're really down to their last bean, it's a mere drop in the ocean. Where I *won't* go and pick up casual drinks is from the sort of people with a steady habit of frugality; they do notice when suddenly half the gin's gone, because it puts their whole week's accounts wrong. But even *your* thirst couldn't ruin Felicia more than she's ruined already. Besides, the pubs aren't open yet, so—" "Stop," I cried, "here we are."

Jennie spoke approval of the Queen Anne façade of Felicia's house. Orlando, who seemed to have lost his soul during the last forty minutes, said that he wanted a drink.

"You're on the very rim of getting one, Orlando, so do lay off

this dark Eastern melancholy. At this very moment"—we were opening the gate and walking up the garden path—"at this very moment Sylvia and Lionel are preparing to rush forward with their arms full of bottles."

But we had to ring. This was not characteristic of a Maitland welcome. And what was still more strange, presently we had to ring again. And again. The bell began to sound, not as though nobody inside had heard it, which is one distinct way that bells do sound, but as though it were heard and would not be answered, which is another way.

"Are you sure you said *this* Thursday?"

"They can't all be out . . ."

"We're a bit earlier than I said, but even then Sylvia was so terribly excited when she heard we could come—"

"Try knocking."

"I want a drink."

Inevitably one of us, Jennie or myself, began to say: "I wonder if there's something wrong?" We were chilly and baffled, and badly wanted to hear our friends exclaim that they were glad to see us. Oh, and Orlando wanted a drink. It was all so different from the impulsive surge to the front door at the first sign of a car: "*There* they are!"—And everyone talking together. You never know how you count on this sort of a warm welcome until you are left standing blankly on the wrong side of a front door.

Footsteps within; not hurrying, no; more as though playing for time; deliberately slow. Fumbling at the lock, Lionel opened the door. He did not look exactly surprised to see us, but certainly he did not look pleased; he looked . . . cautious. And he *asked* us to come in, and that was strange too; surely it might have been taken for granted? And once we were in the hall, he asked us to come into the sitting-room; and he asked us to sit down, and remarked that Sylvia was coming presently but that she wasn't quite ready yet. And then he spoke the line that drew a low moan from Orlando—"Tea will soon be ready," he said. If Lionel had not been so altogether unlike himself, I would have retorted: "Tea nothing; Orlando's been making the car hideous with his wailings for a drink during the last three-quarters-of-an-hour"—Our usual happy terms of intimacy with the Maitlands would have made this the most natural remark. But I, like the other two, was getting rapidly sucked into this unfamiliar atmosphere of a dream; a dream where I had only imagined that

invitation on the telephone, or perhaps it had never happened, or perhaps it had not been fixed up with Sylvia at all but with somebody quite different . . . In one moment I should look down and find I hadn't got on the lower half of my wedding-dress.

Lionel continued to make laborious conversation, mainly about architecture and where the house had been skilfully renovated. He did not mention Felicia, so neither could we, for we were compelled to tread his footsteps. And then Sylvia came in to relieve him—"Keep them going somehow for ten minutes; talk about the fireplaces, Grinling Gibbons, anything, until I can take over!")

"Peter *darling*! I'm so sorry! I was lying down, and when you came, I hadn't even started my hair!" (But when did that ever prevent Sylvia from calling out joyful greetings and suggestions to come up and tell her all the dirt in private session?)

We introduced Orlando. It fell very flat. Sylvia was polite, of course, but mechanical. One might have been introducing a-business-friend-of-my-husband.

"Do come in and have some tea," said Sylvia; "it's all ready now."

Neither Jennie nor I looked at Orlando; we dared not. Sylvia went on: "We won't wait for Belmont and the others. You haven't met our attractive Belmont, have you, Peter? Or have you? She's a charmer."

I had always felt from Sylvia's descriptions that Belmont the brilliant and the beautiful, Belmont the fascinating and the well-turned-out, Belmont the altogether irresistible, was not a bit my cup of tea . . .

" . . . Cup of tea; I expect you're dying for one," from Sylvia at the head of the table behind the Queen Anne silver equipage. "Now how shall I arrange you?" . . . But she was so distraught that somehow we all drifted into the wrong chairs round the table; Jennie and I next to each other on one side, Lionel at the foot, and all the best chairs left conspicuously empty for Belmont and her train. Orlando, who presumably had no desire to be in any close association with a table on which tea was spread, hovered in space in a disembodied sort of way somewhere behind and beyond Sylvia, smiling wanly; hoping, I suppose, that if he were not positively given whisky, at least he would be negatively given nothing.

"Where on earth is Felicia?"

"Oh, I expect she'll be coming in," murmured Sylvia, passing tea over her shoulder to Orlando. "Oh dear, I oughtn't to have served you first, ought I?"

Orlando's wearily deprecating smile indicated that it couldn't matter less.

"Where *are* my manners?" continued Sylvia, forcing herself to be the bright hostess; and she made meticulous enquiries as to whether Jennie and I took milk and all that.

"Lionel, pass Peter a savoury sandwich or a hot cake—" Then she lapsed again . . . poured a little tea into the hot-water jug and gave Orlando another cup; not the same cup refilled; literally another cup. Glancing aside, I saw him carefully pour both cups of tea into a Famille Rose vase.

—Suddenly they all burst in. They filled the room, Felicia leading them, radiant and welcoming; Sylvia sprang up, welcoming and radiant; Lionel glowed on a deeper, more masculine note of greeting . . . Hubbub of voices and counter-voices, of seating and re-seating; we grasped that *now* the event had happened towards which the whole day had been building: They had come. Red carpets and flags and the National Anthem. They had come. "But, darlings, how *late* you are"—and some deliriously comic explanation from Belmont. Jennie and I were introduced, but sketchily. I cannot remember whether Orlando was introduced or not. All the love, all the entertainment, all the attention in that room were focussed away from us and on to the others; we were left feeling snubbed and small as though indeed we had no physical presence at all. Even when we volunteered a remark, our voices sounded unconvincing from the sort of hollow place where we had been left derelict. Once, certainly, in a perfunctory realization of Orlando's claims, Sylvia passed him a cup of tea—(she did not want him to feel left out!)—at about the same moment that Lionel took off the two strange men Belmont had brought along with her; took them off in that atmosphere of unspoken understanding between men, that they would prefer drinks to tea. And a few minutes later Felicia slipped away too, after exchanging meaning looks with Sylvia, who was then quite free to devote herself to Belmont . . .

A woman with a surname for a Christian name has an unfair advantage over other women. I, Gladys, declare this to be true. It suggests a bravura quality even before you see her, and I should imagine it gave confidence to the bearer; like the youth's banner



with a strange device Excelsior; of which the dictionary says: "Excelsior, U.S. soft shavings of wood for stuffing"—(Is that what the youth was trying to sell, up there in the Alpine village?)

Jennie and I had had enough. We were not quite sure how long it might be before Orlando wore through his lacquer of good manners. "Darling, we must be off. Heavenly tea. See you soon. Bless you." An example of the dire way we all say "Bless you" nowadays, without meaning a thing; simply because it makes a good ending to any bogus or embarrassing occasion. "Go to hell" would be a much better ending: "Darling, we must be off, heavenly tea, see you soon, go to hell." Equally bogus, for naturally we do not really wish them to hell, but at least it does not destroy a lovely wish by making it commonplace.

Sylvia looked infinitely relieved; I was prepared for that by now. She protested, of course, and of course we continued to show the greatest reluctance to tear ourselves away; nevertheless we went on tearing. I thought she was seeing us out . . . but in the hall she changed into Felicia: "You're not going already? I haven't seen anything of you!"

"No, haven't you, but we must."

"Won't you have a drink first? Just one for the road?"

But one has one's pride, even in a bewildered dream; and thank goodness, Orlando had already de-materialized out into the Suffolk twilight.

"No thanks, really. There wouldn't be time—"

"I'm awfully sorry", Jennie interrupted me, being madly inconvenient; "before we start I must just . . ."

"Yes, perhaps you'd better." For we had no Famille Rose vase handy, Jennie and I.

"Upstairs and first door on the left." I had spent a pleasant week-end once in this house. But by now Felicia had vanished again (or perhaps she had never really been in the hall and I had imagined her), and Sylvia had reappeared with a cry of dismay at my directions: "No, Jennie darling, *don't* . . . I mean, you needn't go up there, there's one down here . . . All those stairs", a little incoherently, for Jennie was young and limber, and had already capered halfway to the landing before Sylvia's voice brought her down again.

Lionel joined Sylvia for the seeing-off, which was so perceptibly nearer to their heart's desire than our arrival that we could not even be hurt or jealous, only amazed that our going should awake

in them the same eager happiness as Belmont's arrival. Various little acts of helpfulness connected with the car and the garden gate ensured that there should be no hitch in our departure. The car glided off. Lionel and Sylvia turned back into the house. Our visit to High Larling was over.

... "And *now*!" said Jennie or Orlando or myself, "perhaps you will tell us just *how* they disposed of the body?"

"Or *if* they disposed of it? Remember, we interrupted them nearly an hour too soon."

"And the others, their confederates, were nearly an hour too late."

"Damn bad luck."

"But I think it's all right now."

"Oh, yes, it's all right *now*, they've got rid of it."

"Whose body do you think it was?"

"I'm not quite sure, but I don't think that matters, do you?"

"Where do you think it was? That's what interests me most."

"In the upstairs lavatory, of course; it's a lavatory-bathroom, with plenty of room for a body. Jennie, you ought to have gone on up regardless; then we'd have known."

"You can't force your way into people's upstairs lavatories if they expressly ask you to use the Gents Downstairs."

"Oh well," resigned, "perhaps it wasn't there itself; only a sort of rusty tinge in the water where they'd been washing their hands."

"I wonder if they did it on purpose or if it was a ghastly accident?"

"On purpose, because of arranging for the others to come and cart it away."

"Yes, I'd forgotten. No wonder they had the horrors when all the arrivals slipped into the wrong slots."

"I wonder," murmured Orlando, "if we'd have got our drinks if the slots had been right?"

"No use wondering. I wonder what the police are going to make of a Famille Rose vase full of tea?"

"Some of it with sugar and some of it not."

"Orlando dear, that bit's going to be awfully difficult, even for Sir Bernard Spilsbury."

"Not Bernard's department. That's for Poirot and Reggie Fortune and Lord Peter and Handsome Alleyn. Spilsbury doesn't do the outside body bits."

"Whose body?"

... And there we were, back at it again.

"Let's reconstruct the crime from the moment they heard our car draw up. First they thought we were Belmont—"

"I didn't like Belmont," sighed Orlando, "nor her rabble crew."

"Her hired assassins."

"They got drinks. They're having them now."

"They're *not*. The drinks were just a blind. By now they'll be dragging it downstairs and driving it to the old limekiln."

"The coast, my sweet."

"The limekiln."

"The coast is much easier."

"I favour the hearthstone. Safer in the end, and Felicia's not the sort who would mind having it there."

"But let's go back: One of them looked out of the window, and to their horror it was us, not the others. Quick!—What were they to do? Lionel was the least dishevelled . . ."

"Lionel always is."

"So they sent him down to keep us—"

"No, there was a moment of indecision first. What about letting us ring and ring and not answering? Then one of them said: 'That might look queer afterwards at the inquest'."

"Heaven knows they were queer enough once we were let in. You can't know how queer, considering it was the Maitlands." And I tried to convey some idea of their normal hospitality, their spontaneous overflowing gift of enthusiasm for their friends which might have seemed exaggerated had one not known it to be absolutely genuine. "I'm never so appreciated anywhere as by Lionel and Sylvia—No, certainly not by either of *you*; you're chilly compared with them—usually."

"Yes, *usually*, that's the whole point."

But now I had begun, I could not stop: "And as for bounty, they usually spread a sort of Royal feast, a land overflowing with milk and honey—"

"It's not the lack of milk and honey that I've been complaining about," Orlando patiently explained. "Not that I *did* complain, did I? *Did I?*"

"No, sweet. Your restraint was admirable, and you shall put your nose in the trough directly we get to Norwich."

I went on plugging the usual-Maitlands: "Usually the only trouble is to get away from them."

"Hardly any trouble about that to-day. I wish you'd stop saying 'usually' about them—"

"But that's what I'm *telling* you. They weren't the Maitlands, they were the Macbeths. They weren't *themselves* to-day; they were queer, alien, possessed—"

"I still think," Orlando had a gentle quality of persistence, "that even with It upstairs they would have done better to have given us drinks, or at least me, and sent us away a little bit fuddled. Whereas now we're abominably clear-headed—"

But that did not last long. The hotel bar was luckily empty, and after the first deep and satisfied slaking we were able to return to our fascinating speculations, but in a more grandiose vein. And at dinner presently, with an excellent Burgundy to enrich our bloodstream and illuminate fantasy—

—Well, that's the worst of a joke when it's too much fun, and especially when things have been so freakish and puzzling: We were carried away, could not check ourselves, caught it from each other . . . And went to bed *almost* believing that only a body in the house could account for what had happened to us at High Larling.

The next morning at breakfast we did not speak of it again; caught in the same curious vein of silence by common consent, as the children in "High Wind in Jamaica" who never referred to it when they were all at the window and their brother John fell out and was killed.

—Until on that very day, Sylvia rang up. And by Sylvia I mean Sylvia; the old Sylvia. Or was she a little bit too exuberant and too longing to see us? Felicia would drive them over, she said, and we must have drinks with them, she said—"Jennie, tell Orlando I want him. Can't wait. News!")

. . . "That'll be *lovely*, darling. We didn't seem to see you at all last night. You just rushed in and rushed out, and Felicia's fallen heavily for Orlando. I can't say I blame her! He couldn't be more witty and enchanting."

"I *could*," said Orlando when I reported this; "I *could*, but I'm not going to be; not to them. All that tea! I'm glad I'm the kind that bears malice, sometimes for ever."

They rollicked up. They embraced us indiscriminately. They couldn't have been more witty or enchanting, or more demonstrative or more lavish or more truly affectionate. Round after round, on various bubbling pretexts; several for the road long

before they went on the road. Compliments, praise pæons, appreciation of Orlando in particular; he was now the famous writer with a vengeance; their vengeance, not his—yet. Jennie and I were famous writers too. Belmont did not exist . . . her shade might have been hovering in the background with a cup of lukewarm tea. Everything about us was couleur de rose; seen through rose-coloured spectacles; we were la Famille Rose. At last, with valedictory shouts and love and bless-yous, they drove away into the sunset.

Six weeks later, we heard that Felicia had been made bankrupt, and that the mortgage on High Larling had foreclosed.

Six years later, in fact a few weeks ago, when Sylvia and I happened to be talking of people acting bogus and what we felt about them and did they think they were fooling us, I suddenly decided that this was a good moment to ask her straight out about "That Time":

"Do you know, darling, we've been seeing each other off and on nearly every day for years, and the only time I've ever seen you masked, you and Lionel, and not very good masks either, was that time when you invited us to come in for drinks at Felicia's place in Suffolk. What *was* it all about?"

I could swear that Sylvia was being entirely sincere when she racked her brains to remember if anything at all queer had happened. I had to keep on reminding her of the bits and pieces. At last she was able to enlighten me, but not at all dramatically and with no sign of embarrassment:

"Yes, I *think* that must have been—but I didn't know that it *showed*. . . . Didn't she go bankrupt soon afterwards? The bank were going to foreclose and she couldn't pay the interest; just one of Felicia's desperate messes; I imagine she's still having them. But when you're staying with her, you have to try and help, and to sell the house was her last chance, and Belmont is always so sweet and helpful, bless her, she was almost positive that one of her rich males would buy High Larling—it was pure Queen Anne, you know—"

"I know; Lionel told us, that time."

—"So we fixed up for her to bring him over, and Felicia was going to show him round and pamper him and use her charm, which of course she couldn't do unless we saw to it that she didn't

get even a smell of a drink before they came. We'd been having a lot of that all the week, because she was so dreadfully worried, poor sweet, and suspense always made her worse. They were late, weren't they? Or were you early? Or both?" And then Sylvia finished reproachfully: "You three went off in a tearing hurry, I do remember that; but I don't remember being bogus or wearing masks or anything."

I went on arguing, still bothered over the queerness of it all: "Yes, but all that wouldn't account for not letting Jennie go upstairs to the lavatory, or the endless time you kept us waiting outside the front door, and then only Lionel appearing, and making talk about architecture."

Sylvia tried her best to satisfy me by remembering nice, sinister reasons, but it was no good. Her replies were frank and clear as daylight, and so were her blue eyes. Lionel, she said (and it was true) simply adored talking for hours about architecture, if he could find someone to listen; it was one of his pet subjects. She supposed she had not been ready when we arrived. She supposed she had not shouted for me to come up because I had Jennie with me whom she did not know so well, and then there was Felicia trailing about upstairs being rather helpless and wovey. And she supposed (still without actually remembering) that the downstairs lavatory had been nearer for Jennie, and anyhow the prospective buyer was meandering about the first floor tapping the wainscot.

"The whole thing boils down to this"—I was a little exasperated (for it was all very well *now* for her to be so rational and to have such a bad memory)—"You weren't, any of you, at all glad to see us. Why?"

"But, darling, we *were*. We're always glad to see you. How could we not be? And I do remember this at least, we'd all been simply dying for ages to meet Orlando."

## CHAPTER XV

### "BAG OF MASKS"

THIS story hardly emerges with a moral, but it may be enlightening as a polyphoto of what happens to our minds the instant we bring them in contact with unreality. The Maitlands

could not help their temporary unreality; they had only the unselfish idea of somehow helping a friend through a bad patch; but the effect on us, because we did not understand it, was that of a severe snubbing: We came prancing along sure of our welcome, and lo! (or hello) no welcome for us, only for Belmont and her crew. Self-defence, after we left, put us under compulsion to dramatize the whole business, and almost at once we got drunk and infatuated with our own imaginings. Then memory set it in this shape of fantasy, so that it was hardly surprising, when I brought it to Sylvia six years later, that her lack of recognition was entirely genuine. Nevertheless (as all nations say of the war) "They began it!" when they laid the corpse of truth flat under the hearthstone.

Stephen Vincent Benét died not long ago. I could have supplied Death with names from a waiting list long overdue, before he need have struck here. Benét wrote "John Brown's Body". He wrote of:

Honesty rare as a man without self-pity,  
Kindness as large and plain as a prairie wind.

He wrote that Invocation for City Spring which I have already quoted in the first chapter of this book. This sonnet on the masks we wear, some of us always, very few of us never, comes out of "The Golden Corpse":

The years have harder tasks  
Than listening to a whisper or a sigh.  
They creep among us with a bag of masks  
And fit them to our brows obsequiously.  
Some are of iron, to affront the gay,  
And some of bronze, to satirize the brave,  
But most are merely a compost of clay  
Cut in the sleepy features of a slave.

In a letter to John van Druten, replying to his characteristic comments on my new book "The Young Matriarch" (and by "characteristic" I mean his engaging gift for getting as cross or as delighted with any aunt in fiction as though it were his own aunt making a nuisance of herself in the next room) I argued that various of my people whom he found exasperating, I found also touching. When I had finished writing why, I came to the sudden conclusion that all human beings are as touching as they are exasperating. This is a discovery which ought to make me very

nearly god-like to live with, if only I could hang on to it and use it all the time. But that is a very large "if only", and I must have lapsed within the first five minutes. Easy enough to see what is touching when there is nothing maddening about it to cloud its limpid quality and deflect our sympathy. For instance, this extract from a letter which was an exhibit at the Hants Summer Assizes, where a man was tried for bigamy, and wrote to his wife: "It appeared to me that you did not want to have a baby (always telling me to be careful and what not). So, at last, someone (who is not afraid) is going to have a baby for me." None of us could fail to be moved by this illiterate and fumbling way he expressed his deep and bitter disappointment at the girl he had married, who so clearly had no feeling for life, but put in its stead a sort of fidgety self-preservation. And I remember seeing a woman whom we had all thought single-mindedly devoted to one man, take infinite trouble not to notice him but to collect and keep around her every other man within range; of course we realized that flirting, in her case, did not mean she was getting tired of him, but that on the contrary he was getting tired of her; and she, caring more than ever, was desperately trying to show him how he was about to throw away carelessly something that still had power to attract; touching enough, though we could not help being slightly irritated watching her activities, her ripples in all directions; she should have sat down and kept still. It is always painful and embarrassing to watch somebody hard at work behind a mask, when your instinct assures you that the object of it all has guessed the motive and she might as well take the mask off again. Othello and Swann, in their plural agonies of jealousy, command our passionate sympathy; nevertheless, in real life a human being suffering from jealousy rarely gets even a shred of it:

"*Darling, I believe you're jealous!*"—(with a smile that pretends to be incredulous that any person within one's ken could possibly be so small-minded and petty and uncontrolled and lacking in pride and altogether despicable).

"It's so *silly* to be jealous. After all, where does it *get* you?" (Where indeed? Shakespeare told us; so did Proust.)

"If there's one thing I'm *not* and never have been, it's *jealous*. I simply don't know how to be . . ."

But take this down slowly and clearly: *One is not jealous for fun*. Jealousy is never luxurious or self-indulgent; it is an affliction, as severe a handicap all through life as to be born with a club foot or



a tendency to asthma. A jealous person who can manage to put up a fair show of decent and unselfish behaviour, burdening no one with his or her unconquerable malady, is worth at least ten times the person who has to endure nothing of this specially reserved hell, saying gaily: "Darling, I believe you *mind*!"

Women who tamper with their ages can be compared with those minor offenders who tamper with the petty cash. Yet I suppose they too are touching, for they cannot mind about their age as a number of years, but only for fear of what each increasing digit might lose for them. All the same, they exasperate me, and I have to control myself not to be purposely heavy-footed when I see them at their tricks; especially where I had never suspected it; we are liable to be shocked at the exhibition of a fault which happens to be not one from which we suffer ourselves; I mind so terribly about so many things, but I do not much mind about age and years; at least I have been let off that. I shall mind only when physically it must mean harsh prevention from bathing in sea or river and fooling about with boats.

I am strongly tempted now to leave the general for the particular, and call up for comment a procession—not of Swanns and Othellos and their female counterparts abandoned to tragedy on a grand scale—but of women where each typifies a group; letting them trip along "doing their stuff" (or being their stuff) in front of an improvised back-cloth.

Begin with the following brief scene reported between an outgoing and an incoming secretary:

INCOMING SECRETARY (*paying little attention to the files and stationery, breaks in on a husky note and with a slight foreign accent*): You, do you wear anything under your dress?

OUTGOING SECRETARY (*older, neatly tweeded, with her severe little air of professional relevance*): Well, really, I—

INCOMING SECRETARY: My husband likes me to wear only a white satin slip! . . . Has *she* a temperament?

OUTGOING SECRETARY (*understanding that this indiscretion refers to their employer downstairs*): I hardly know her well enough to judge.

INCOMING SECRETARY: I have a terrible temperament. It is my despair. I cannot at all control it.

OUTGOING SECRETARY: I doubt in that case if you will make a very great success of your profession.

INCOMING SECRETARY (*not even beginning to suffer from frostbite*): My husband . . .

## "BAG OF MASKS"

Confidences grow taller and richer ; scarlet runners that need no bean-pole but rush up unaided and brandish at the sky.

Then a woman with a deserved repute for beauty and fascination : She has a muffled heart, to disappoint you like the taste of a pear that has no taste.

Next, a woman with a gift for words and no inhibitions ; proving that eloquence is a great hindrance to profundity. While groping for words, you are compelled to think hard and deep about what you mean ; but eloquent people can pour it out before they have time to think at all.

After her, a woman in the act of resigning a certain presidency which had involved a lot of tiresome responsibility. She wears the beatific expression of one who takes off an albatross hung like a locket about her neck, and hands it to the Ancient Mariner she has always most disliked.

An enchanting young woman (pre-war) leading the life of a play-girl, who knows she is being criticized for not using her undoubted mental powers ; she wears that look of fierce prerogative, walking haughtily as though in a charmed circle immune from work. Critics of this gay young "parasite-type", of whom once there were many, would condemn her for laziness. That, however, is the wrong diagnosis ; nearly always, this girl was vibrant with energy ; her trouble was arrogance ; if she could not begin at the top, she would not begin at all. Why, she might have had to work *under somebody stupid* !

A woman who introduces you with a pregnant : "I specially want you to meet Mrs. So-and-so !"—Thus adding to an unimportant encounter, an atmosphere of mystery and privilege not in any way justified by Mrs. So-and-so. Or, come to that, by yourself.

The woman boldest in robbery, who has a reputation and manner of the prettiest diffidence. Beware of her shy technique : Violets are treasure-trove "in their proper place" sprinkling the terraces under olive trees in Italy ; not so bad in clumps along by the sweet-peas and tomato plants in an English walled kitchen-garden. Leave your pocket-book with her, if you must leave it somewhere ; you *may* find it again—with as much chance as now and then I hope to find the walking-stick of ivory, ebony and agate which I dropped in the Royal Deer Park outside Copenhagen in 1936.

Here comes the woman who uses repeatedly : "Though I say

it as shouldn't" for a prelude or tag. Again, contrary to the usual summing-up, I think she is not smug or conceited, but suffering from an inferiority complex: At some time of her life she lost an auctioneer, and having got accustomed to the inspiring sound of his sales talk, had to adopt the phrase as a little joke to cover the necessity of selling herself.

And here the woman whose "only real fault" is a hot temper: "It flares up and then it's all over. I never bear malice." This woman unfailingly rouses in me a sort of exasperated desire to appear flat-footed and insensitive, and to stump about among delicate imputations in hob-nailed boots. A reaction not free from sadism. Or it is more than possible I might bite back with a Noel Coward snap in my voice: "I don't flare up; I sulk and brood for days and weeks; I can't ever forget; I plan revenges"—simply for the sake of seeing her look at me in astonishment that I should not be clever enough to conceal such an unattractive personality.

We now appear to be lining up for a Grand Finale of Tiresome Women. Even more provocative to my hob-nailed boots is she who says: "With my slender means . . ." And to her, too, I have always longed to retort blandly: "Oh, are you *poor*? Then I'll pay; I'm richer." But so far, I have just managed to be civilized, and refrain.

Worst of all, the woman who develops her personality "with a view to making herself interesting" (especially to authors). She inspires in me a preliminary thoughtfulness which I well know is going to lead to a shout for my hobnailed boots. She has never quite owned up that she might be insignificant except, unconsciously, by a collection of prefixes: "*Well*" (pause) "I don't know what *you* think, and *plenty* of people would think *me*" (pause) "*mad*. But I don't *care*, I always *have* and I always *will* say—" And here follows a perfectly ordinary right-thinking platitude, stock pattern, of the kind that come in sets, so that you can always replace a broken one. To the psychoanalyst, she is clearly a "vanity case"; thinking she is one *in* a thousand, whereas she is one *of* a thousand.

Another line in vanity cases tries to be original and unconventional and at the same time play for safety by bringing out a statement or a point of view which she knows by previous experience will accord with mine. The only way in which I can then sublimate my irritation (a vile way) is immediately to jettison my own opinions, replace them with a completely opposite set (the kind I wouldn't be seen dead with) and leave her marooned, "holding

the baby." Presently, after slight bewilderment and bother, she will manage to get rid of the baby and be as she was in my opinion (so she thinks) before she began.

This is not an indoor sport that I can recommend. I am truthfully a little ashamed of myself afterwards. But no woman has a right to develop her personality by offering me my own personality with the mistaken idea that I shall like it when I see it!

A kinder way to deal with vanity cases is by flippancy uncomplicated, when they bring you Something Deep for discussion . . . Let us say, the pathological aspect of Boris Goudenov. I invariably refuse to descend into these vaults, but merely remark that families in opera are rarely cosy to live with, and the Goudenov family particularly unc cosy . . . Like brides who might not even ask their husband's names, and Wotan and all his Walküre mess, loving his daughter who loves her brother by his other daughter . . . Even in "Louise", I continue, chatting pleasantly, family life was not too harmonious, for did not Act One end with le père de famille breaking up a chair to hurl after his only child as she escapes to live in sin with the stout artist at the window opposite? (I heard no more that evening of the pathological what-you-calls of Boris Goudenov.)

I am also a trifle allergic (meaning that she brings me out in spots) to the perpetual lady bound in limp suède who feels "there is something behind it all" and surely I must feel the same: She told me that she always consulted the spirits before she got through to her stockbroker, whereas it would have been so much better to have consulted her stockbroker before she got through to the spirits.

I am now going to quote from myself, which always makes me feel rather odd and self-conscious. The following passage, therefore, is with courteous acknowledgment to the author of "Little Red Horses":

"May I ask"—bluntly—"whether my daughter has been brought up as a Christian?"

"She has been brought up, Captain Day, as more than a Christian."

"There's no such thing", he retorted. But he admired the woman's pluck. Fancy saying this to him! With an effort at tolerance, he asked her what she meant by *more* than a Christian? . . . And for the next few minutes ensued a very difficult struggle, while Joanna Rosenfeldt tried to explain, and Robert Day to

assimilate, the incongruities of a sort of mixed religion, which, like a rolling snowball, was caked with every other known religion which had clung and gathered on its course. He remembered when, as a very small boy, he had been set to tidy his mother's work-basket; a tangle that began in the middle with a few skeins of silk, which somehow, wousling and spreading, had caught all the hooks and eyes, the oddments of tape and bodkin and elastic, cotton and patterns of chintz, buttons and wool wound in balls on twists of paper, ends of sequin trimming, and yet more skeins of silk, knotted inextricably into a matted highly-coloured, solid confusion . . . Joanna Rosenfeldt had been a devotee of theosophy, Buddhism, Christian Science, William Morris, New Thought, Spiritualism, Joanna Southcott and the Second Advent, and could quote whatever suited her from all or any of these; an indolent skimming of cream from at least twenty-two honest religions, any of which would separately have rejected her synthetic rearrangement, and disclaimed her as a proselyte. She had even blandly filched a few Talmudic and Messianic prophecies and adjurations from her husband's religion. She believed in the writing on the Pyramids, and in other Apocryphal statements. She believed that Mind could reign over Matter, and that Love could heal everything, and that Wisdom should temper Love—the Wisdom of Tao, she added, kindly, for Captain Day by now was showing signs of deep distress. She did not forget auras and astral planes and the acquisition of grace through immobility and the development of Pratyahara. Utopia and Beauty and the pilgrimage of Old Souls came into the tangle; and how, when Evelina had first brought her and Halcyon together, she had recognized at once that in another incarnation they had had something to say to each other, and had left it unsaid, but it was now being said in deeper, fuller tones . . .

Captain Day, gasping several sentences behind, suddenly recognized a word he knew, and thought he had got the hang of it. "I see, I see. You believe that we were once animals, and that if we don't behave ourselves like Christians, we go back to being animals. Is that it?" He had on one voyage been plagued by an earnest lieutenant who had pestered him about a theory of the transmigration of souls, and this much had remained behind.

And Mrs. Rosenfeldt, abandoning all attempts to initiate him into the creed of MOM<sup>1</sup>—Mind Over Matter—merely forgave

<sup>1</sup> This word MOM got into circulation among my friends, and we used it so frequently that we all forget that it was not a dictionary word. I naturally, therefore, do not blame

him and smiled again, that smile which uplifted her into spheres where she was in direct touch with unseen and healing forces, and where were assembled the thousands like herself who also ate MOM honey, and cleaned their shoes with MOM polish, washed in MOM soap, and were tolerant with their poor ignorant Captain Days . . ."

In contrast to the MOM lady, I must present Young Hearty arranging columbines at the bedside of a patient at the hospital, who was suddenly moved to exclaim: "Wouldn't one almost think that somebody had *designed* them, instead of their just growing out of the earth?"

I honestly try to discourage all these women from coming anywhere near me, so that I need not sublimate my irritation, having a shrewd suspicion that this is only a phrase for behaving badly. If you hear me say at a first encounter: "we *must* meet", you will know that it means we never shall if I can help it. "We *might* meet" is much more hopeful. And allowing myself to behave badly, however much I may call it sublimation or getting it off my chest, is not likely to earn me the sort of obituary notice which I found some time ago in *The Times*. "A lovely, radiant woman, unselfish, tolerant, loyal, brave, sincere"—followed by a sprinkle of Greek. The pendulum swung right over when in the Personal Ads. I found that a companion was required for an elderly lady of "morose disposition". I do hope that the morose lady inserted this herself in a fit of frankness which does her eternal credit; I hope, too, that her companion, when found, took a liking to her in spite of the morose disposition.

I wish I had not left out from my procession the woman of bogus helpfulness, who when your trouble is so black that you could wish her to San Francisco (as the Man Who Could Work Miracles wished the policeman) will bend over you and in a voice of sweetly modulated sympathy and encouragement say: "Cry, dear, it will do you good. And then I'll bring you a glass of Horlicks, nice and hot." Fat lot of use—(I have a special drawer where I thrust away "Fat lot of use" people, and it is full to

John van Druten for not interrupting himself in spontaneous conversation, by a conscientious: "Oh, by the way, I think I ought to mention that MOM is not my own, but invented by Peter Stern," when I discovered that Ivor Brown paid tribute to the usefulness of MOM, but acknowledged it to John van Druten, in his fascinating book "A Word in Your Ear". By the time it reached me, my sudden loud cries of: "Hi!" and "Look here!" were too late to alter the mistake. I am therefore putting in this explanation now, by permission of both gentlemen concerned.

bursting)—If you are not crying, you probably know that you are at that stage when you must not, and it needs no forcing. Of course there was Tennyson's "Rose a nurse of ninety years, Set his child upon her knees, Like summer tempest came her tears—" but there, too, I have never been convinced that Rose did the right thing; she was probably past her work and should have been superannuated (or by "Rose" did the poet merely mean that a nameless nurse got up?—The text is a little obscure; there remains no doubt, however, but that she was ninety).

Early in life we are taught Stoicism: The Spartan Boy, etc.; the fox likes it, and so forth. That it is babyish to cry, was one of our first lessons. Then these bogus women arrive later on in a rest-gown, and upset the whole idea while they go through the gestures and tones and words of healer and life-giver.

How niggardly that our language only provides one word: "Woman", to cover both the life-givers and the life-takers. Luckily, I can supply out of my encounters with the life-takers, an abundance of pleasurable synonyms. For these are the devil women, the toughs, the get-away-with-murder women, the *Estraperlos*.

To explain *Estraperlos*, I cannot do better than quote from a document which was shown to me in March, 1943:

For centuries Spain has been known as the country of *mañana* where the current slogan has been never to do today what you can possibly put off until tomorrow.

Today, the most common word in Spain is *Estraperlo* indicating blackmarket profiteering in all forms.

During the Republic in 1933 when Lerroux was in power, there appeared in Spain a Mexican adventurer named Strauss with a French partner named Perle. After failing to arrange a boxing match between Max Schmeling and the then champion of Spain, Strauss turned his attention to obtaining a concession from the Spanish authorities to exploit a game of chance, a kind of manipulatable roulette which he and his partner Perle had invented and given the name of *Straperlo*.

The public, however, was so incensed at suspected corruption in high places that after a debate in the Cortes, the concession was withdrawn.

However, the name "Straperlo", or rather "Estraperlo" the Spanish corruption of this composite word, had come to stay, and has now become synonymous with any form of chicanery, graft, blackmarket and the like.

*Estraperlo* is now rife in Spain from the highest to the lowest. In

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fact it is practically impossible for anyone to live except as an *estraperlista* either active or passive, namely buying or selling on the black-market, or, as in the case of officials, by accepting graft for favours granted.

I shall use an English name, however, in my next few remarks on the devil-women; being gentle and fair to them, I hope, as they have never been gentle or fair by me—nor by anyone except themselves; for their goddess is Fuji Yama, and *Fuji Yama* means "the only one". Perhaps I should have said an Irish name, making due acknowledgment to Bernard Shaw who bit into the copper two acid portraits of the devil-women of the whole world of heartbreak when he wrote of the Shotover sisters, Mrs. Hushabye and Lady Utterword: "the daughters of the witch of Zanzibar"—(I find it hard to understand why "Heartbreak House" is not universally acknowledged without question as the greatest play Shaw ever wrote.) My original name for the species, the get-away-with-murder women, sprang from my exasperated sense of impotence, not at what they were, which had to be accepted, as good and evil must eternally be accepted, but at the fact that always and always they got away with it. The devil who spawns them thoughtfully attends to their looks, for very rarely if ever has a devil-woman been without beauty, usually of the innocent appealing kind, so that it is not possible to discover whether without it they could still work out their destiny and achieve their successes. Rarely, again, are they handicapped, as the rest of us so often are, by some disability of health. The toughs may look frail, it is part of their equipment, but do we ever find them exhausted whatever test the day has brought? They feel no weariness and therefore achieve a shining reputation for endurance. They do not need to rest, they do not catch cold, they do not have spots, their teeth do not decay, their hair does not fall out, they are not short-sighted, they have 100 per cent. digestion—yes, they eat like cart-horses and remain like-greyhounds. Over and over again we have all had to hear the bad news that one of our dear friends, a life-giver, has to undergo a sudden dangerous operation; I cannot remember ever hearing that one of the toughs has had to undergo an operation. Their insides are of granite and fortified steel.

The devil-women are fearless; which is to say that they have no fear. Here again, Lucifer their father has attended personally to the matter; his baptismal gifts are more valuable than the silver mug, the spoon-and-pusher which the rest of us receive. Fearless



as they are tireless, they gain the same shining reputation for courage, valour, gallantry, dash, pluck and guts. The last two are easily the favourites in use: "Ah, but you can't deny that little woman's got pluck!" And: "Say what you like"—we *have* been saying what we like; fat lot of use!—"that girl's got guts; I admire a girl with guts." Of no avail to argue with the inevitable male chorus that we too admire guts, but that guts and pluck presuppose fear conquered, not fear non-existent. The answer to that, as sadly we know already, will be: "Ah, you're jealous!"

Yes, we are jealous. Of course we are. Watching these feminine engines of destruction, watching how they function, how sure they are of the right response, how they sacrifice nothing, help no one but themselves, but help themselves to hell and get away with it; watching while the rough is made smooth for them, the obstacles are removed for them—"Put that on my account", they will say, amused—we know well that the account will never be presented. Somebody will pay it, who cares? Not the Estraperlos, adepts at not caring, and monstrously not caring how they hurt, where they hurt and when they hurt. They leave behind them a trail of wounded, while they go up and up, taking everything and giving nothing; giving not even a moment of gratitude; deflecting all the available attention, all the rays of the sun; human lungs need a little, but they, basking sharks, can never absorb enough; taking the very air from other women's breathing, taking the grain from other women's sustenance, taking the credit for other women's labour, taking reality and smearing it with counterfeit. And because they take the sun and the air, the credit and the attention, the praise and the sacrifice and the sustenance, because they are the life-takers and win nearly every time over the life-givers, we who live in Heartbreak House have to believe in Heaven, for here the life-givers whom we love will at last take precedence.

You will recognize the life-givers down here on earth, not from any special mark of their personality, but by the effect they have on you. When they come into the room they lift the atmosphere, when other friends with as much animation and vivacity let it drop with a dull thud. For animation and vivacity are by no means the same as life-giving vitality. The vivacious woman is using it for herself all the time; she delights in its effect (her effect on me is to make me feel glum); she returns from a party exhilarated by the sure conviction that she has been a succès fou.

She is not exactly conceited; the process is more subtle than that; when we say: "I can't hear myself talk", we experience its opposite; vivacious women *can* hear themselves talk, and their talk sounds to them deliriously fascinating; they are even a little surprised at how fascinating, which shows they are not really conceited; one of the differences between them and the toughs. A vivacious woman can easily be a nice woman as well, but terribly exhausting as no one benefits by her vivacity; yet if she were writing down a list of her own good qualities (in the back of the Week-end Book) she would begin by allotting herself eleven out of ten for charm. But the woman with vitality has a gift of life at her unconscious command, and brings it to you freely, unaware and unsolicited. This woman has a genuine way of enjoyment, that by trailing vines and purple over the simplest festivity, sounding cymbals over a mere glass of fruit-juice with a dash of gin in it, makes entertainment on a gaudier scale perfectly unnecessary when she is about. You can be sure that this is not put on as an act designed for the display of a child-like unassuming heart, because of the dancing gaiety in her face and in her voice. You meet with the same spontaneous lighting-up to sudden radiance when you go to her in trouble; naturally you are at first a little disconcerted at her seeming lack of sympathy . . . till you grow to know her well and understand clearly that her first delight is uncontrollable that you should have had this impulse to come to her, proving that she has something valuable to give; it is not her vanity which is fed, but rather her humility, which tosses off one draught of this tippie and then, throwing away the glass, is ready for action, ready whole-heartedly to offer aid.

Being so good a giver, she is inevitably a bad taker, except when she is offered good company with laughter (this she can whale like a chorus-girl of the Old School with a case of champagne). But though she welcomes a present in theory, she fights it when it appears in substance. I have never really been able to analyse what is at the root of this reluctance in the life-givers who are bad takers; it is not that they suffer from awkwardness, from a fear of appearing ungracious and tongue-tied in thanks; nor is it from a meanness of spirit that fears to let itself be put under an obligation; nor that silliness of: "Thank you, I have everything I want"; and it is unlikely in most cases to be an awful feeling that a friend has made a sacrifice which she can ill afford, and because of your careless acceptance, will have to "go without" herself.

## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

I must suppose, therefore, that it springs from somewhere in the region of the deep humility I mentioned before; an incredulous repudiation of any personal claim to a present.

But her own gifts to me—there lies another story. You never know when they are coming nor quite why they come, for birthdays and deservings seem to have little to do with it. Yet they are not altogether spontaneous, for they have quite often involved difficult preparation and thought; each is a tribute by virtue of its relevance, inspired by fun and good memory.

Her wisdom is always true in its essence and sinewy in its phrasing; never as kind as her actions nor as herself, which is understandable, for wisdom is a bitter distillation, whereas kindness wells up in despite of it.

In her encounters with death, however swollen her private shape of grief, her first and last idea is how not to dismay or embarrass those who come near to console. She deals with this distressing minor problem in the fashion, debonair yet never short in faith or hope or charity, which one might expect from a champion life-giver. For her dead take their way normally in and out of her talk, with all their faults still fresh and gay and impenitent. Not for an instant can you see the dust gathering on a solemn wreath of immortelles.

Yes, I know this woman, this life-giver. When she was young and went to Italy, she brought back an oak-tree in her sponge-bag and planted it in her garden. Now it has grown sturdy and beautiful, and we can sit in its shade and be glad of it.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THEIR EXITS AND THEIR ENTRANCES

“**M**AKETH kittens, maketh baby” . . . Sophia had warned me in June. And now Josephine was dragging herself about, burdened, resentful and bewildered, with not even instinct to tell her that this heavy chastening had direct link with those gay days and mad nights when her spirit was rowdy and rumbustious, outpacing even its own usual quicksilver, streaking over the ground or rocketing to the tree-tops. For Josephine life had

been a riot in June, but here was September, and the grace of God had forsaken her.

And like the Military Tailors, I also had a point of view. For if after three years of war it would have been difficult to find a good home for a female cat, beautiful and lustful, it was a thousand times more difficult, next to impossible, to find a good home for a female cat unwillingly displaying full proof that she was lustful. Of course I would gladly have taken her along to the new London home waiting for me in Albany, but cats were barely welcome there even if they were altered Toms, behaving with neutered decorum and kept carefully under control. Useless to pretend that Josephine, after the freedom of garden and meadow, could either behave with decorum or be kept under any control whatsoever.

Desperately, then, I set myself to the job of finding somewhere, somehow, someone kind and loving who would have no objection. Someone, moreover, who had not already got a cat, or a dog who would never stand for a cat. In vain I exploited her charm for all it was worth; described eloquently (but of course without letting the girl be on view) her great black ruff and deep golden glowing eyes. I vowed that she was affectionate, and did not add "when it suits her which isn't often". I maintained that she ate anything and was grateful, and the first part of this was true, but not the second. I plugged my willingness to pay a weekly sum for her keep and maintenance. My blurbs incorporated the words: "domestic, purring, hob, gentle, semi-persian, spotlessly clean, such company", etc.; but never the words: "jungle habits, callous indifference, uncontrollable, capricious and cruel". Cruel . . . she would lie for hours on the window-seat watching the birds, the tip of her little pointed red tongue showing, her teeth making a sinister chatter, her great thick tail slowly lashing from side to side . . . By judicious bowdlerizing of what was, after all, a perfectly natural edition of cat, I could make her sound a creature all soft paws and woofy seduction. But it was all no use. Nobody would give a home to Josephine's life-giving potentialities, and especially not in war-time:

"Is it a male? No? Oh *dear*! I'd have taken it if it had been a male. I'm so sorry. I was wanting a cat, but you know what it is, hard enough to get to sleep nowadays what with the planes and things, without a lot of Toms *flocking* round and yowling; my husband wants all the sleep he can get."

"I'm afraid not, no. My little girl wanted her ever so badly, but we said kittens in war-time and milk rationed and you can't always get someone to drown them and I should hate to do it myself . . . You see, my son's away; and we don't know ourselves how long we're to stay here; it depends; we might be moved any time, they won't say. It's all so uncertain in war-time. Of course a Tom you can take anywhere, but you did say this was a female, didn't you? And that's different . . ."

All perfectly reasonable.

Twice, however, I thought at last I had been successful and could begin to sorrow over Josephine left behind in the country, instead of frantically wondering whether I should have to face the worst and give an order which would be the consequence of . . . not being able to leave her behind in the country. But each time the respite was brief. "I didn't know she was going to have kittens *at once*." And that was perfectly reasonable, too. The second time my hope was built on a firmer foundation than merely on suppressing the awful truth. A friend of Sophia was told with some eloquence of our predicament; for she had previously taken a fancy to Josephine the Beautiful, remarking quite rightly that the girl could do with a lot of love—"Well, it depends," said Josephine, "there's love *and* love. I don't always want to be mauled about, but I like to sleep on an eiderdown or inside the bed if it's cold and not be flung out at once as they do in their unfeeling way, the brutes. And I like partridge, too, when it's high")—so she was prepared to take Josephine with the impending Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davey, Dan'l Widden, 'Arry 'Awk, old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all. But then this lady was moved from Oxford to carry on her war-work somewhere up North, and could not know whether she would be lodged amid sufficient benevolence as to include a female semi-Persian big with kittens. My disappointment was bitter, for time was racing along and it seemed as though I had exploited every chance, even to accosting strange children in the lanes when I went for a moody walk and Josephine followed me (she often preferred an organized walk lately; for what was the good of swashbuckling on obstreperous adventure when you were *like this*?). "Oh, look," the children would cry, admiring Josephine, "it follows just like a dog." If only Josephine *had* been "it", it might have been like anything it liked. But I prattled with the children, and told them as a lovely great secret that I was giving Josephine away and please

would they tell everybody just in case there was someone who wanted it, big and furry and black, beautiful and gentle, loving and not a thief, not greedy, purring on the hob, etc., etc. (see blurb). The children listened to me agog. Yet nothing ever came of it, nor of the notice I put up in the post-office of my village, and four others in neighbouring villages.

And we were now in the third week of September.

Josephine would have to be put to sleep.

I am calling it put to sleep, not as we would substitute moonlight and violets for blood and corpses, in sentimental objection to facing the bare truth; but because it would have to be done like that, and I would look around for a vet who did destroy animals by putting them to sleep. But though I could make sure of her end being easy and not brutal, the fact remained that it would be her end.

From the moment I realized this, I could only see our black cat as the incarnation of joyous undisciplined life; as far as she was concerned, life that would go on for ever. With a certain amount of bitterness, it occurred to me again and again that had she not been bearing life, she would not now be in danger of being slain. We were arranging to take with us to London a little male marmalade kitten, neutered. He would be fetched and brought here to join the household a few days before we moved. If Josephine had been a male kitten, she too could have been altered for 3/6; she too would have been tolerated in Albany and might have been allowed to live till life slowed down naturally. And yet for years Hitler and Mussolini had been offering vast rewards to German and Italian mothers to behave just like Josephine; even wiping out the shame that for so long had walked with fruitful promiscuity. Thus their armies were swelled; and thus fecundity made the war; and because of the war, a cat that could make kittens must perish for want of a home. Impatiently I dismissed the "only-a-cat" argument offered me here and there, either to comfort me or accusing me of sentimentality. I have already said that I could not be particularly sentimental over Josephine; I might have been, for none of us are immune from those lapses, had she been a one-man cat, depending on the pleasure of my company; she had fits and moods of warm demonstrative affection, and quite these were for me. But Josephine's sole dependence on us for matters of which she herself was insolently unaware sustenance, protection and life. And my feelings toward were for her character and wickedness, her jungle beauty at

tingling pleasure of watching her cat enjoyments, legitimate and disgraceful. To stop life, even a life as small as Josephine's, to be responsible deliberately for quenching the spark, appeared unbelievably grotesque in war-time when life was being stopped everywhere on such a monstrous, such a colossal scale. I could not be responsible for this immense slaughter and preparation for slaughter going on over the five continents of the world, but I would be responsible, I personally, for giving the order to the vet for killing Josephine; for putting out a finger and laying it on all that quickness and urgency so that suddenly it was still. Life is life wherever you find it: And for the very reason that in war, especially in this war, it has to be treated with statistical carelessness, it seems important as never before for each individual one of us not to condemn the smallest fragment of life within our own range of authority. I am not a pacifist; I recognize that it was worked out to such a struggle between good and evil, freedom and tyranny, God and Lucifer, that even if the millions were not consenting to die, they could only retain something less than life; that "he is dead who will not fight, and who dies fighting has increase".

But I must learn more about death, now, while it is attacking us all around, counted with long rows of naught and naught and naught, till imagination reels. I dare not go on knowing so little, never concentrating on the idea as Tolstoi concentrated for years of mental horror and mutiny, till at last he was able to accept death and live with it. For surely the more we realize in words of one syllable that death means the extinction of all we know of life, the harder we will fight against its premature and unnecessary entrances; the harder for every Josephine who produces life and whose little life and death lie in our own hands, not Hitler's.

"Life in hand" is, I suppose, the meaning of a formulated religion, disciplining into shape and rhythm and accessibility the wild spirit of life. Many say: "Why should I need a more orthodox form of religion which urges goodness only for the sake of a reward in Heaven, when I should be good and do good for the sake of what I know is good?" And they say this in austere individual pride, and call it ethics; unaware that they have spoken of the very fount of orthodox religion in those four words "of what I know"—steady proclamation in prose which runs beneath action and conscious thought; ironically obedient as a river denying its mysterious source.

Yes, but this business of taking life prematurely and wantonly—What about insects, I am asked by that part of myself which sits in the Opposition Benches and perpetually asks awkward questions. Yet as it happens, detesting nearly all insects, I rarely kill them, because I can no more bear them as corpses than I can endure them alive. I cannot see them killed, and least of all can I perform the execution myself. I must be honest-to-God and confess that all this reluctance is probably nausea, not a noble tolerant creed of live and let live. It is a queer thing, this insect nausea, which functions quite illogically here and not there, different for nearly each person. One is quite distinctly selective about it, too: I would not kill or have killed on my behalf, ladybirds, butterflies, caterpillars, mice, toads, frogs, lizards, tortoises (never mind half of these not being insects) because they appeal to me and I find them engaging. But equally I would not kill or have killed on my behalf when I am out of the way, any insects which I do abhor, such as wasps, mosquitoes, spiders and bluebottles, because they make me feel sick, dead or alive. That nausea puts the whole thing in a muddle, for it can neither be explained nor sublimated. I would like best to have refrained from mentioning it—but for the Opposition Benches.

I have only once seen death lay stillness on a human being. And my aunt was so old and gentle and diffident that when she died you could almost call it the ultimate degree of self-effacement; so loosely held to those terrible beautiful compulsions in life that sent Josephine down the mobile days and nights, that when I saw her lying on the bed with carved features and hands arranged to fold over yellow chrysanthemums and white lilies, it seemed less like death than even the mere thought of Josephine dead.

I know that dogs display uneasiness at the sight of trunks and suitcases being carried downstairs into the hall; but cats, it has been frequently observed, cats are different—or rather, indifferent, and concern themselves little with what we are doing and going to do presently. So we could be fairly safe in believing that Josephine had no premonition that judging by our behaviour sentence of death must fall on her, directly her kittens were born. No vet will undertake to destroy an animal while it is carrying its young. Her first batch of seven were all born healthy and late, and of these Tommy was the highly-strung survivor—("I've no patience with all that nonsense," said Josephine to Jessie from next



door; "highly-strung my eye! Let him get on with it, he'll learn.") Her second litter however came early before we were expecting them, and really before Josephine had done very much selection of which drawer or hat-box would best serve her lying-in. They were born in the woodshed, where Josephine slept every night alone and in a rage, except when she could manage to circumvent our false wheedling calls and persuasions, stay out under the harvest moon, and casually mooch into Nan's downstairs bedroom at any hour of the night or morning and finish her slumbers on the bed. Three of the kittens were born dead, one died shortly afterwards, and we had not known that there was a fifth until she brought it along, also dead, and affectionately woke up Nan with a: "Here, my dear, you're a nurse, would you like to have a shot at this? Sorry I can't stay now, but do what you can"—and sprang forth again, light and unburdened.

So during what were presumably her last few days of life, though we gave her the earth and everything besides, I am sure she accepted it all without suspicion of her jeopardy. She never indicated that *really* we were spoiling her, that the cream of the milk and the soft of the eiderdown were not for such as her! On the contrary, she lapped and basked and danced through the hours of that glorious week in September as though privilege were her birthright, and as far as she was concerned it might go on for ever. The natural perversity of things brought round one of her affectionate phases; we could have dispensed with it. "Go away and grieve for your kittens, you little horror", I would say, my heart wrung a hundred times a day by the sight of Josephine running to meet me across the lawn with glad impatient little mewes and burr-rrs of welcome; of Josephine tearing after an apple that I had rolled over the grass, outpacing it in her zest and swiftness and tearing back again to meet it; of Josephine and Tommy behaving like *le ballet Russe de Monte Carlo*, in a saraband round the apple-tree, leaping sideways with a succession of genuine *pas de chat*, legs suddenly stiff and backs arched high like croquet-hoops; of Josephine catapulting on to my pillow for her early morning half-a-biscuit, vibrating desire from the end of her huge swinging tail to the tip of her snub little black silk nose, at the creak of the tin being opened and the tantalizing crunch of the *petit beurre* broken in two . . . and then, when every bit had been fed to her, slowly trampling-out-the-grapes before she subsided on my chest to lie there contented, replete, half asleep, eyes drowsy golden slits; of Josephine following

me at the trot along the path beside the stubble at sunset ("How nice it is to get away sometimes for a quiet walk, just you and me!"); of Josephine on the very rim of danger, surpassingly alive.

And then came the reprieve. Four days before she was due to be put to death, Sophia brought it in a letter from the understanding friend of hers who would have taken Josephine pregnant, had she not been moved from Oxford to the North. I had not realized that Sophia's: "Oh, my dear, *no*. I've been out with Josephine for breaking down my nemesias, but I can't bear the thought of those glowing eyes dead and glazed . . . Something *must* be done!"—meant that she wrote forthwith to Mrs. Collingwood declaring the urgency. The response was this offer of a home with the Y.W.C.A. somewhere near Harrogate, where she would come in for a surfeit of love and scraps, and if we could arrange for her transport she would be met at the station with a Rolls Royce, red carpet and silver tuba band.

One small, very small difference between cats and ourselves is that a cat can be enticed into a basket by a bone, the hatches clapped down on her spitting wrath, and thus she travels whether she wants to or not, in charge of Providence and a guard benevolent to livestock. From a village in Berkshire to a camp near Harrogate could not be called exactly a direct line; but luckily an angel agency called Spratts, when I telephoned them with that nervous tentative approach known to all of us since the war ("Oh, please, I suppose you don't still . . .?") replied promptly that of course they did still, and would be glad to meet Josephine at Paddington—"Put a label on the basket with full name and address"—and take her to spend a night at the Savoy or Carlton, and see her off again at Euston by the morning express, in charge of a North-going and equally benevolent guard. They were interested to hear of Josephine's destination, and their approval indicated that all the best cats went North at this season—the moors and so forth—and though the Glorious Twelfth was over, she would be in time for some pretty fair sport.

And of all this, Josephine still knew nothing and went her wanton way. The things that Josephine did not know! Such as the act which led to that heaviness of kittens, dragging down her buoyancy; nor that she would presently be as buoyant again; nor what would have to happen first. Nor her nearness to death, and the galloping messenger at the eleventh hour waving the reprieve from the Y.W.C.A. The things that Josephine did not know! Ahead of

her, change and a journey and a dark man (from Spratts); "You are at the cross-roads", trouble followed by feasting and merry-making, love and success and . . . let me see, is it thirty-eight—no, more like fifty-eight children in less than five years. The things Josephine did not know! That her son Tommy, to whom she had so often described the lyrical rapture ahead of him when he was a little older, would never, what with one thing and another, fulfil himself on a spring night in rapture on the tiles; nor why an alien marmalade kitten should suddenly descend on our home, emerging cross and crumpled from a basket, carried quickly from the garden into the woodshed, and there carefully shut up: "It's only till to-morrow, after all, and it's Josephine's last day here and she'd half kill him if they got together, so she needn't know he's here at all." But of all these things, that was the sole item that Josephine did know; she was perfectly aware of Tips shut up in the woodshed, and completely indifferent, except to be sardonically amused at the idea of half killing him: "Why bother, while I go free and pampered and privileged?"

Pampered and privileged and free . . . an open basket on the lawn, a succulent bone inside, persuasive voices cooing like doves, fervid kisses and hugs—"Oh, don't *bother* me with all this nonsense when I've had nothing to eat since lunch"—ten minutes ago. "Hi! Stop! What the hell? . . ." Darkness, prison, bumping, an engine starting up, and the voice of the biscuit-giver saying: "Thanks ever so much, Mr. Harris. You *will* look after her, won't you? And here's five shillings for the guard."

There, with the grace of God, went Josephine.

A good gardener is careful when he moves a plant. Threads of root so lovingly lifted from a loosened soil with the crumbs of kind familiar earth still adhering, he will carry it to the favourable new home he has selected because of certain greater advantages, and gently he will replant it, pat down the soil, water it when the sun is off, hopefully leave it with a prayer for warmth or rain, whichever the plant might most need at the moment. And almost at once it droops and looks pitiful; almost at once it looks as if it were dying of sorrow . . .

Give it time and the plant will gradually lift its limp leaves; pull up sap and strength from the new earth and show tentative bud and blossom. A fine cheerful plant, people will remark . . . it will feel a little just a little guilty for having made such a fuss at first.

Nevertheless, the process of transplantation even to easy and comfortable circumstances, always in my own case meets with strong resistance, and then, when it has to happen, limp leaves and dying of sorrow. Although I know all about my reactions beforehand (as I should at the age of fifty-three with so many moves in my life) no amount of trying to be strong, reasoning with myself, remembering my past experiences of gradual acclimatization after a move, can persuade my soul to want to go on living. I fall apart into two selves; one self is logical, adult, grateful for amenities, with a fair sense of proportion and humour and an ironic memory of other times when all this has happened. This is the self which sends letters of remonstrance to my swooning Psyche, but they all get torn up unread.

I am without exception the world's worst mover; mentally adaptable, yes; stimulated by new encounters, fresh places, different phases and experiments in my work, pleased at the prospect of travel, visits, adventure . . . and then come home again.

*And then come home again.*

But move? Move my roots, lift them from the clinging earth, drag them up, carry them away and set them down again in unfamiliar soil:—No, oh *please*, no! I do not suffer only inconvenience and homesickness, but a deeper, wilder, more intangible grief and horror; wholly forlorn; wholly lost. This is the little death.

How strange, then, and how terrible that nearly the whole world is being transplanted; nearly the whole world is on the move. Nowadays change is terrible because change is sudden and violent; no talking it over beforehand, planning, making the best arrangements, the plant lovingly lifted from the loosened soil with the crumbs of kind familiar earth still adhering. In the good old settled days when women were destined for monotony and domestic routine, people used the cliché: "That will be a nice change for her", whenever at rare intervals a little holiday was mooted; taking it for granted, then, that change *was* nice, in a different spirit from Stanhope's reply to his batman offering him a nice cup of tea, in "Journey's End"—"Can you guarantee that it's nice?"

That is what we need and what we cannot have when we move and change: a guarantee that it will be nice. In Jean Rostand's biological study: "Toads and Toad Life", a favourite passage says: "On April 1st I found a female toad in a fairly deep hole;

she had certainly spent the winter there and consequently had met no male." The cadence of this is a little mournful, and the moral—ah well, the moral is obvious: If you spend the winter in a fairly deep hole, you meet no male . . . The period, I think, is mid-Victorian.

Since the war began, male and female we have been tumbled out of our fairly deep holes and cannot foretell where we are going to spend the winter—or next week. The Navy, the Army, the Air Force called up first, their families following when possible, to be as near as they can; evacuees of the old and the very young from town to country where it is safer from air-raids; children bundled off to America, some accompanied by their mothers after that terrible choice had been made whether this were better, or to stay behind with their husbands? The moving of industrial workers all over the kingdom; the unrehearsed invasion of Britain by heterogeneous patches of Armies from the Occupied Nations after Dunkirk and the fall of France; the move inland from coastal areas during the scare of German invasion; big air-raids breaking up homes and scattering families; women mobile, women to the Services; arrival of armies from abroad, and via England shifted abroad again; requisitioning; refugees.

People talk of "real" sorrow when they mean sorrow legitimate in war-time. This list of legitimate sorrows starts by death on Active Service of someone belonging to you (a sweetheart counts as belonging). You are also allowed anxiety over your children far away, and over your wounded far away. And you may grieve that you are prevented from doing enough for the war-effort if legitimately prevented. Nearly all other sorrows have to be classed as selfish, petty, personal and "unreal".

Among these, apparently, are old people fretting for their homes that have been requisitioned. Requisitioned is a ruthless word; nobody can argue with it and hope to come off best. The most subtle and difficult cases, however, appear when the final arbitration does not rest with the Government's Emergency powers, but with the individual and with local opinion.

In a certain little river town, I heard of such a case. Two ageing school-mistresses had managed between them to save and buy a cottage with a garden looking on to the water. Here they proposed to retire when their work was done. Here, sure of peace and gentle happiness, they would live and be no burden on anyone. Naturally it did not work out at quite such a smooth gliding motion along

parallel lines. The more active of the two had to retire before the other, to look after a terribly crippled mother; not in the cottage; somewhere up North. The cottage meanwhile was let, but still they looked forward to it one day . . . And just as the other was due to retire, war broke out and she remained at her job, with the extra strain of school evacuation and all its attendant worry and responsibility, till a year or two later the strain broke her down. But then it looked for a moment as though events were coinciding in a kindly way: the crippled mother died, and so the stronger of the two elderly school-mistresses (how old is elderly? And how old is old?) was free at last to look after her friend who had hung on longer to her job but was now in a bad way. This was the congested period when everywhere was overcrowded and nowhere could space be found and you wondered what had become of all the homes; but at least the two old school-mistresses were all right: they had their cottage.

Had they? Their tenant had gone, but the nomad months had somehow brought in a soldier's wife with four small children. By law, the owners could not move her out unless they found her "alternative accommodation" in the neighbourhood in which she wished to remain. There was no alternative accommodation in the neighbourhood where she wished to remain; or had there been any, the two old retired school-mistresses, one of them very ill, could not manage to find it. They were themselves lodged separately and most uncomfortably: one in grudging lodgings, and the other where she could not have any of the peace and comforts she needed to restore her to a fit state of health where she could help to look for alternative accommodation for the soldier's wife, and so enable her to live in the cottage which would restore her to health. A vicious circle. "I'm settled here with the children," said the soldier's wife; "it's been bad enough, what with Bert being taken for the Army and losing a well-paid job, and I don't want to unsettle again with the kids getting on so well at school, liking their lessons and fond of the teacher, and as for this blessed move, move, move all the time, I'm just about fed up!"

She was paying a much smaller rent for the cottage, a rent of such dimensions as politely we call nominal, than the old ladies had to pay in their separate and quite inadequate temporary accommodation; so temporary in the case of the one who was ill, that she could never be sure of more than a week ahead. There was a

great deal of correspondence and agitation, and one or two scenes in which things were said, chiefly by the soldier's wife, for retired school-mistresses are hampered at these moments. The soldier was acutely distressed at the situation, but of course could not move away from the East Coast where he was stationed, to assist in the matter.

I forget now how we came to be drawn into all this; at least, not into it but on the outside edge, but I do remember a discussion and an attitude that infuriated me, because it was not only dangerous and unkind, but also unfair and illogical: My opponent said that the old who had no more to do with life than sit and wait for death need not be considered in the housing problem during war-time. Now I am aware that "soldier" and "children" are talisman words in this struggle, and that "breakdown" and "old school-mistress" cut no ice. I am aware as well that it would not help to stress an element of irony (irony *never* helps) that two people who spent strength and devotion in the cause of educating children, must now at last stand outside the gate of their own home where they had never yet lived except in longing, because four children were settling down nicely to their lessons. If it were officially admitted, as in certain Utopian states, that after a certain age people encumber the earth and take up so and so many unnecessary square yards without giving adequate return to the State mentally, morally and physically, then fair arrangements should be made for their pleasant and painless extermination; as in Max Beerbohm's delicious parody of H. G. Wells, called "Perkins and Mankind". But while this is not done, and while self-extermination continues to be punishable by law, then the right to live, and above all, the facilities to live, must be equally distributed to every age. To leave people alive, to forbid them to remove themselves, but at the same time to talk of them contemptuously as though their very breathing were a crime, a robbery of youth and its chances, seems to me a most damnable code. Youth or age is a purely arbitrary test of usefulness.

But at least the victims of these sorrows and confusions were still in their own country, and being disappointed in their own language. We who are English and still with England around us, can only rarely by the page of a book or the hearing of a refugee's broken story drive ourselves with full imagination out of our own country and into exile. Negroes and Israelites are the eternal

waifs and strays . . . Dixie and Swanee River, Zion and the Waters of Babylon, Alabam' and Tennessee, the Promised Land and Jordan and My Old Kentucky Home. And Ruth in tears amid the alien corn. How strange that the lovely story of Ruth and Naomi has left no trace on the mother-in-law attitude all down the ages; they remain as the only protagonists of a son's wife who loved her husband's mother.

And if our imaginations are too slack to realize, except in a sudden appalled flash of feeling, what the banished have to endure, one man has laid open the multitudinous agonies that wait for them:

"Oh Friar, the damnéd use that word in hell"—Banishment rather than death and imprisonment was the doom inflicted by kings and tyrants in the history that Shakespeare knew. And now that once again banishment is the fate of half the living world, Shakespeare still remains their living interpreter. Not only Romeo but Prospero was banished, and the Duke, Rosalind's father, Valentine in "Two Gentlemen of Verona", Macduff exiled by his own flight to England from the mad blood-lust of a usurping Thane: "Stands Scotland where it did?" he asks, making those five words sound for the moment more poignant than any outpouring of the homeless. Sometimes I wonder whether Shakespeare himself was ever able to forgive King Richard II for his unforgivable banishment of Mowbray and Hereford in the first scene of the play. Whenever I read that scene, and then of Richard, later on, vanquished, humiliated, dispossessed, bankrupt of majesty and threatened with death, as articulate in his night of grief as he was callous in his youthful days of power, I can still never be moved to pity for his plight. One can forgive youth for what it does in carelessness, but Richard was not merely youth committing a sin of youth when he suddenly banished Mowbray and Hereford; he was dull and obdurate, not caring when he hurt or how he hurt; not caring what he had promised nor if either deserved the fate of Ishmael. They were about to fight out their quarrel, and he had appeared to sanction the fight; as a King he was impersonal; as a cousin he pretended to wish that Hereford should win. Mowbray's speech before the Marshal bids the trumpets sound, recalls to my mind what Rebecca West once said, how often Shakespeare flung his most glorious lines into any mouth that happened to be around. She was, I believe, thinking of Le Beau's "Hereafter in a better world than this, I shall desire



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

more love and knowledge of you". Who remembers Mowbray :  
But who can forget :

Never did captive with a freer heart  
Cast off his chains of bondage and embrace  
His golden uncontroll'd enfranchisement,  
More than my dancing soul doth celebrate  
This feast of battle with mine adversary.  
Most mighty liege and my companion peers,  
Take from my mouth the wish of happy years.  
As gentle and as jocund as to jest,  
Go I to fight : truth has a quiet breast.

Richard, however, can apparently only be moved by his own eloquence. He stops the fight, and on some trumped-up suspicion banishes Hereford for ten years and Mowbray for life :

The sly slow hours shall not exterminate  
The dateless limit of thy dear exile ;  
The hopeless word of "never to return"  
Breathe I against thee upon pain of life.

—And could not care less.

Then Mowbray speaks, then Shakespeare speaks for all the banished, all down the years :

The language I have learnt these forty years,  
My native English, now I must forego ;  
And now my tongue's use is to me no more  
Than an unstringed viol or a harp,  
Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up,  
Or, being open, put into his hands  
That knows no touch to tune the harmony ;  
Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,  
Doubly portcullised with my teeth and lips ;  
And dull, unfeeling, barren ignorance  
Is made my gaoler to attend on me.  
I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,  
Too far in years to be a pupil now ;  
What is thy sentence then but speechless death,  
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath :

Franz Werfel, an author really successful in translation, exiled to America after the Anschluss, said to me in 1937 : "It is strange to think that never again will I write a line to be read as I wrote it in my own language." I did not think then of the banishment scene in "Richard II", but when I reread it, I knew that never need we try to describe what the refugees of our present decade were enduring in exile over the wide continents. That too was Shake-

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speare's own territory, though he had no measure more impressive than the scale of his own nostalgia when perhaps sometimes in the Mermaid he remembered the woods at Shottery, the lanes of Henley-in-Arden.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE CAT SAT ON THE MAT"

Thank goodness, the moving is over,  
They've swept up the straw in the passage  
And life will begin . . .  
This tiny, white, tiled cottage by the bridge!  
When we've had tea I will punt you  
To Paradise for the sugar and onions . . .  
We will drift home in the twilight,  
The trout will be rising . . .

IT was not exactly like that, my move from the Berkshire Downs back to London and Albany, though the first three lines of Ford Madox Hueffer's little hymn of thankfulness do very nearly resemble my own feelings at the end of the first week. Nobody punted me to Paradise for the sugar and onions, though there, assuredly, is where they are kept nowadays. Nevertheless, the moving-in men, a much maligned gang, were almost too helpful, zealous, loyal and compassionate; proudly desirous for us to know, in Dickens's idiom, that "Todgers could do it". Our actual date of moving-in was October 1st, but we reserved it for the essential preliminaries of carpets, electricians and curtain-hangers. And we passionately begged the different firms who were sending up the other stuff to deliver it without fail on October 2nd. Too passionately, too persuasively. The plan of organization was fine, but unluckily we overdid our emotional part of it and underrated the kind hearts and noble efforts of all those concerned. For they did not wait until October 2nd. Everything arrived together and almost within an hour on October 1st, and piled up in the hall, chair upon chair, Pelion upon Ossa . . . twenty-four hours before we could even have possibly desired to see a three-legged stool; and this in spite of the fact that there was only one veteran-and-a-lad where there had been ten strong men before.

When that kindly incendiary bomb of October, 1940, had left me to build up a home again, some time in the future, with

fifty-seven walking-sticks and two antique Apothecary jars from Savona, these had struck me even then as an inadequate though not altogether cheerless foundation for starting fresh from A to Z. The only irreparable loss I suffered will embitter me, I fear, for the rest of my life. Just before it all happened, I was down in the country recovering from a couple of major operations, and I told my cook to start bringing me a few things which I should need for my work before I could return to London again; particularly, I told her, my "Encyclopædia Britannica". She arrived with a case of these volumes from A-Anno to P-Plan. "Where's the rest?" I said ungrammatically and a little cross. "Oo, them others wouldn't fit into the box, Miss; I'll bring 'em next time." She forgot to touch wood! Before "next time" my whole library was in ashes.

Naturally, all the vital information I have needed since then, lies much further on than P-Plan, for when you come to prove it by such rigidly unalterable conditions, most words begin with S or W; just a few can be found under R or T; nothing at all before P. If I had lost the whole Encyclopædia, I should have been quite simply compelled to go out and buy another. Now, if I bought another, I should possess an Encyclopædia-and-a-half, which (as Euclid used to say) is absurd, and an unjustifiable extravagance in war-time. Of course I *might* meet a man who had lost the first half of his Encyclopædia in the Blitz, and had managed by a miracle to keep the rest up to Z-Zyg; in that remote contingency I would marry him at once.

Some of my friends, braver for themselves than for others, as people so often are, strongly advised me against complete refurnishing, in case—well, to put it crudely, in case the same thing happened again: "Get just what you barely need and manage with that!" But what-you-barely-need is not a home, and this struck me anyhow as the wrong attitude, or certainly as the wrong attitude for me, making each hour too brittle and precarious. It is no good living vulnerably; the spirit would grow too tender and die.

I was glad that my dining-table, or rather, my living-room table (for we sit, eat and work in the same pleasant Regency room) was made by the village carpenter at Ruston Copthall. It had four sturdy kitchen legs, one suitably at each corner; for that, honest and unpretentious, was his only conception of a table; Hepplewhite, Sheraton and Chippendale, three peculiarly gracious names, did not

exist for him. Nevertheless, it stood firm as a rock, and the top was a beautiful slab of walnut. Old Corderoy had a good romantic name of his own, derived, I believe, from *Corde du Roy*, referring to the French king's hunting breeches. He was a grand workman of the traditional British type: slow, ruminative, philosophical, refusing to be hurried, refusing to be dislodged from his own notions of wood and tools and what can be achieved by the proper use of them. He worked in a vast Tithe Barn dating back from well before Tudor times; the sun poured through the chinks and beams, and dropped in puddles and pennies of gold on to the half-finished pieces of oak, elm, walnut and pine. His sons, who were also his apprentices, were both serving. Of one he said: "Can do without he", and of the other: "Ah . . ." a world of regret in that "Ah". Old Corderoy would presently be sure to show you the pride of his heart which was "a secret drawer" inserted at the back of the drawer in the table (a baby in arms could find it; a burglar would split his sides laughing at it). Corderoy also supplied the walnut kerb of my fireplace, my coal-scuttle and paper-rack, and three or four walnut stools as sturdy as the table; odds and ends of country comfort settling down happily with my two huge modern arm-chairs and my few elegantly-carved period pieces from antique shops in Mayfair or from some small Riverside town. Well-made things, by some law of nature, cannot help but blend into a harmonious whole, whoever made them, wherever you bought them, and certainly whatever they cost. The last time I had a sitting-room in Albany, I had paid heavily for a delicious piece of discomfort called a Queen Anne Love-seat; I cannot help being sorry for prettiness to have ended so incongruously on that sensational pyre, but the age of love-seats (on which no one would dream of making love) has passed, to be replaced not unhappily by Corderoy's notion of a table from which everyone can eat their dinner and still enjoy before and afterwards looking at that slab of plain shining walnut from the tree his sons cut down in the garden before they went to the war.

Lamps were rather a troublesome matter. We all know and dread that Poltergeist (is he architect, builder or electrician?) who neatly and with great care places plugs and switches in positions where they cannot be reached except by high endeavour and crawling under the bed. We used to be able to get over that by long flexes, but nowadays "they" look terribly shocked if you ask for an extra yard on to the lamp flex; as though you had

asked for something indecent. Flex, or flexes, are to-day as running gold set with diamonds. You must put up with a short flex, plant your lamp near the plug, and group the furniture accordingly. Yet my chandelier, a graceful cone of dangling crystals, reminds me with a nostalgic pang of the best Viennese Waltz period, and I can hardly believe that I picked it up in a modern electric-light shop in Tunbridge Wells, and not inside one of those doorways that open under the magical sign ANTIQUES.

I learned that there was all the difference in the world between antiques and just a junk shop. In two delightful little towns beside the Thames, I picked up—no, that is a maddening phrase indicating all sorts of abilities I do not possess, such as an astute eye, a connoisseur's knowledge, a love of bargaining—I *bought* nearly all my furniture. Directly after the conflagration, I noticed an inlaid pear-wood table with lovely eighteenth-century legs; I am deeply susceptible to the curve of table legs; so after a brief struggle with temptation, I fell, on the excuse that after you have taken a violent toss you must immediately get into the saddle again and ride, or lose your nerve for ever. At the same time and for the same reason, and of course with the idea of burnishing my morale and not just acquiring property, I bought a lovely green and gold incomplete Rockingham tea service; and later on, in Mayfair, the contra-Buhl glass-fronted cabinet to hold it. These terribly expensive, terribly exclusive Antique Shops in Mayfair are, by the way, not impossibly expensive nor exclusive; you must not enter diffidently, nor burst open the door with a defiant "I am as good as you are" air, but walk in quietly as though it were your village general store of the good old days and you wanted to buy a ball of string, a packet of striped humbugs, a tin of sardines and two picture postcards . . .

But a junk shop is quite a different matter. Once, long ago, we used to pass them while we motored swiftly down long dreary shopping streets on the outskirts of the larger towns; their wares, piled up on the side-walk outside, seemed to be mostly rusty firearms, broken-down bedsteads, and some rather nasty chipped porcelain of obscure uses. I had determined at the beginning of my furnishing adventures that I would be really economical, avoid antiques and do a lot of my buying at these junk shops. One *must* be practical, I said. I had forgotten certain trifles of contemporary history, such as transport and petrol consumption, and that junk shops have no means of delivery. Once the purchase is made, they

become offhand, not interested in how you propose to move the stuff. They indicate that this is your funeral, not theirs.

As for the fifty-seven walking-sticks, several of the glass ones by a happy experiment were hung crossed on the wall over the doorways; and one slim Regency cane laid on the bow-fronted walnut bureau, deserving this distinction because it is the kind of stick that the first owner of these rooms might have carried negligently as he strolled down our quiet Arcade to Piccadilly and St. James's Street, to sip sherry and exchange news of the Napoleonic wars and possible invasion, with other young bucks of his Club. All the rest were gathered into a sherry barrel standing in a corner, a fine place for a collection of walking-sticks. The barrel was a present from Sophia: a pre-war reminder of bountiful days when her son in the Navy had brought it back to her full of the authentic Solera, Amontillado, Manzanilla, Tio Pepe—(not all together; take your choice!). He was killed flying at Malta, one of the gallant in that desperate defence early in 1942. The brilliant little patchwork cushion which I made for him because he wanted a spot of vivid colour for his cabin, was sent back with his things . . . And I remembered how he had written in amusement to say his Maltese batman considered it was the most beautiful object he had ever seen. It *was* rather attractive, being made up in a crazy pattern of brocade and velvet and satin and silk, flowered and plain, from materials that a very old aunt of mine must have bought in the leisurely 'eighties and lively 'nineties, on her placid expeditions of shopping-without-coupons in Westbourne Grove. When she died two years ago, we found them in trunks which had been in store for thirty years . . . Queer to think how in more stirring reincarnation than their tissue-paper era, they had voyaged to Malta and back on such strange adventure. In the Dutch cabinet with the glass doors I now arranged the best of her Dresden china, her Royal Worcester dessert service, and a few touching idiotic relics of ostrich-feather fan, an embroidered card-case, her Limerick lace mittens and her lawn monogrammed wedding handkerchief. She also left me some linen, china and glass, so that I did not have to buy it all. I was lucky in this, for I was told (and rightly) they would be the worst part of refurnishing in war-time.

My living-room carpet I happened to see through having taken the wrong turning on my way to buy soap (two coupons) in the largest and most up-to-date store in Oxford. I am not usually fond of patterned carpets, but I thought this one really rather

good . . . Later, an expert on rugs and carpets told me it was an excellent reproduction of the famous sixteenth-century Ardebil carpet (worth a million) hanging in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Its colouring of soft blues and wines, its design of medallions, arabesques and Mosque lamps, melted in with my walnut furniture and my Spanish leather screen and my two pictures on the faint silvery-green panelled walls, as though I had spent years of my life in the dreamy quest of it. I must confess to being somewhat ashamed of my previous ignorance; one out of every two of my friends remarked on seeing it: "Hello, isn't that the Ardebil carpet from the South Kensington?"

By the odd perverse way of inanimate things (so-called, but I darkly suspect the "inanimate" part of it) while I had rather dreaded that this newly-furnished room would look too bright and modern, it shifted and settled down at once to an atmosphere almost too mellow and sober and subdued, too old-walnut and port-wine and Forsyte Saga; so that I kept on trying to unsettle it and give it dash and colour, which it courteously absorbed and yet retained its comfortable air of an excellent old vintage.

Providence in the shape of the Government decided that it would greatly help the war-effort if I had no bedroom curtains. I could have sitting-room curtains, I could have carpets and chairs and tables and wardrobes, cushions and lamps and desks and bowls and brushes and brooms. I could have marmalade kittens and fifty-seven walking-sticks and two pottery jars from Savona . . . but my bedroom curtains I chose and ordered, less and less hopefully, three separate times, and always the Board of Trade, grinning broadly, intervened with fresh regulations that just happened to eliminate those special curtains unless I produced enough coupons to keep me from having any clothes whatsoever for at least the next two and a half years. The windows in all those Regency rooms are of lofty and dignified proportions that cover almost a whole wall; I went to bed with a stretch of very dense black-out stuff pulled crookedly across the windows, instead of the folds of nasturtium and copper and old gold I had rashly promised myself. And I felt I was present at my own lying-in-state, and became a little despondent and wistful. It had only needed this to strengthen and justify my usual panic mechanism, that instead of moving into a nice new home I had moved into the Waiferage and was there for life.

It was during this Waiferage interim that I caught sight of

the Hiraz rug smouldering in its upright frame in the carpet department of Liberty's. From the moment I saw it, I began to implore Satan to get him behind me, knowing perfectly well that Satan would not dream of it and that I should have to do all my resistance by unaided effort. I kept on wandering away from that rug and then coming back to it. I told myself that I did not want it, and then, stepping a little further into the kingdom of truth, that I badly wanted it but was not going to buy it. Yes, but I had not yet bought a carpet for my bedroom . . . A further advance into honesty convinced me, as it would have convinced anyone, that this was not a bedroom carpet, this was a Hiraz rug, a miracle rug, a rug set up and framed behind glass and therefore a priceless rug. Not a bedroom carpet; a bedroom carpet was quite different. So I walked away again, round the different departments, and bought a few quite sensible things that I really needed for my second home in Albany, and said to myself: "this is the sort of thing; you're sensible, that's what you are!"—And went on calling my attention to my thrifty and sensible nature. And fortified by this, returned to the rug, and in an off hand manner asked the price, and bought it.

Directly after, by what seemed then to be direct inspiration, I worked out a way to buy it which would be absolutely conscience-proof: That legacy from my aunt had included a diamond brooch which I kept down in the vault at the bank; I never wore it; nobody ever saw or rejoiced in it. I had already sold the rest of my share in her jewellery, and bought Savings Certificates; now I could sell the diamond brooch and buy the rug I had bought, and that would be for usefulness as well as for beauty's sake. It should lie on the floor and be walked upon as though it were quite simply a carpet; in fact, if I could lay hold of another couple of Persian rugs, I should not have to buy a bedroom carpet at all . . . And as it was, quite a plain one would do. It was terribly difficult at this stage of the war to find a plain carpet as a background for the rug, but I remained obstinate in my resolution, my William Morris resolution, that a rug must fulfil its original purpose and be walked upon, and not treated as an *objet d'art*. I built my room round my knowledge of what was coming to it, but because it was so far from a Waiferage rug, resolved not to have it delivered until the far distant moment when I could tear down and fling aside that ragged stretch of black-out, and see instead my waterfall of blue and green brocade curtains. My rug, which was perfect,



must be saved from contact with that ugly makeshift, because I had already arranged in a region of my mind which is under no control, that this glorious thing I now possessed was meant as a compensation for all the property I had lost three years before. I would be able to say to myself every time I looked at it: "This at least is flawless".

Meanwhile, hating indoors, longing to be back in my old rooms that gave the Military Tailors a view of my shot gold and orange taffeta curtains, feeling not resigned, feeling cross, feeling unlucky all over, I spent a lot of time doing an Ishmael up and down the Rope-Walk; looking in at the windows of the other ground-floor chambers, or rather, not looking in because they had curtains to protect them (beasts!) and I the derelict, I the banished, me the practically homeless, I had none! Nobody cared; they were all indifferent if I were comfortably indoors or out here in the cold, out in the Rope-Walk wandering up and down . . . Even the cats at their games or sitting in Parliament paid no attention whether or not I had any bedroom curtains.

The only creature who seemed as if he might have been in sympathy with my outlook on life, with whom, in fact, I might have compared notes had I known the language, was a thin dejected-looking little black cat with fretful whiskers and without even a sandbag to sit on. Nor did it take much acumen to guess what had so largely contributed to his cynicism, for twice it happened during my peripatetic strolls up and down the Rope-Walk, that he happened to run across the path of some ecstatic female, one a new resident just arriving, the other a casual visitor, who both burst out with: "Oh, *look!* a *black cat* and he crossed my path! That's *bound* to be lucky!"

. . . "Luck!" complained the thin black cat afterwards to the sentimental Chinchilla on the sandbag, and to Tips a few rungs up the ladder. "All very well to bring luck, but precious little fun to *be* luck. And who thinks of that? Who thinks of us black cats and the everlasting bore of hearing fools chortle: 'Oh, look! that means luck!'"

Alvar Liddell, large and black and handsome, who had padded up to join the conversation, remarked contemptuously: "Fools! I'll say you're right! Some of them will go to any length of dodging about to force me to cross in front of them if I'm going that way or not. I've no patience with superstition."

"Nor have I. What do I get out of it, I ask you, if a black cat

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crosses *my* path?"—At that moment a female black cat from outside the pale did mooch across, and Little Misery went after her like a streak.

The sentimental Chinchilla gazed after them placidly: "I suppose I *am* superstitious; I can't help it; my great-great-grand-mother on my father's side (the Worcestershire Chinchillas go back a long way) was a regimental mascot."

"So are goats," said Alvar shortly. "And as for superstition, there's nothing in it. Why, if a rainbow could speak, what would it say? 'More floods to-morrow!'"

Tips, the youngest of the group, here inquired diffidently: "What is a mascot? Am I one?"

"No, dear boy, Gingers never are; but you needn't mind about that; I expect they're very fond of you all the same."

"I couldn't care less if they are or not; but you still haven't told me what a mascot is?"

The thin dejected black cat trotted up and joined them again: "Wash-out as usual . . . Still talking about luck? I suppose Aunt Ethel is telling you about how lucky she's been ever since she saw a piebald mouse not through glass on St. Whittington's Eve."

"As it happens," the Chinchilla preened, "you're perfectly right. You can believe me or not just as you please, but I *am* lucky and I *am* superstitious. Of my last litter but three, all six were toms and not one was drowned, and now five of them are walking out and I said each time that if I'd searched the world over, I couldn't have found a sweeter tortoiseshell for my son."

Tips and Alvar spoke in chorus; one: "Why *should* they have been drowned?" and the other: "Were your sons Chinchilla?"

"Not altogether . . ." murmured Aunt Ethel, and sneezed delicately behind her paw.

The peevish little black cat again spat out a vindictive: "I tell you I'm the unluckiest cat I know." It seemed to be an obsession with him. "My mother only had four lives instead of the regulation number, and the first person who said cats always fall on their feet should have seen what happened to my half-sister . . ."

"Oh *dear*," murmured Aunt Ethel, with the kindly but vague commiseration that the lucky always display towards the misfortunes of the luckless.

I was in a mood to agree with the thin cross black cat. Luck is the weather, as heartless and incalculable. The hazards of luck, rather than well-administered opportunity, can give us health,

vitality, serenity, the power to win love and carry it safely without spilling it; it can give us sleep, fun, and encounter that leads to fun; success and riches and a career can be destroyed by bad luck; a germ will do it in a flash, though a spirit of persistent worry and discontent will take a life-time. "Bad luck!" people say. Luck is the weather; it can destroy the whole picnic. Fairy-tale and fable knew about luck, with their good fairies and bad fairies round the cradle. For luck follows its earliest choice and does not often touch a middle-aged shoulder; no flit-about, though it is usually portrayed as will-o'-the-wisp. Whatever a just and solid administration may wish to provide for every one of us in fairness and equality, to hold fairly and equally by law and government, they cannot adjust luck, which is beyond all their exasperated control. They can only function in collaboration with luck; and luck is the weather, it refuses to collaborate. We are better off, certainly, than we would be without these schemes of reconstruction and opportunity for all, inasmuch as we are better off with raincoats, umbrellas, goloshes and omnibuses than we would be with no protection at all against capricious squalls. Give the workers this and give them that, help the housewife here and help her there, fairness and equal opportunity for all—but good luck comes along and has no general summons for the herd, but carelessly calls the individual by name; and you wait breathlessly for yours to be called, your own name (luck knows it) not the "workers", "the housewife", the "common man". Whatever an honest and responsible government may arrange to provide for you, it cannot give you that spark and spirit, that solicited gift, that bright will to live which luck bestows or withholds, tantalizing you with glimpses, throwing a trailer on the screen: "This Great Attraction is Coming Next Week!"

You hunger for solid opportunity, but you thirst for luck. And the slaking of thirst is a more potent miracle than the satisfying of hunger. The Christian religion knew well enough that it had to contend with this lust and longing for luck, and countered it by a sincere statement that whom God loveth He chasteneth.

I am compelled still, when not thinking with my mind but letting it swing back to the habits of childhood, to believe in a kindly personal God, or at any rate to pray to Him for help. I desire blessings and favours from this God. I talk of "luck", meaning good luck—a qualifying adjective need only be used when the luck is bad—and that is probably why I so deeply long for it, because

## "THE CAT SAT ON THE MAT"

I must mean instinctively the assurance and the reassurance of a personal God, the God of my childhood whom an "intelligent" adult has no option but to dismiss lightly—"Just a matter of luck!" pretending no belief in its strength or constancy. "I'm always unlucky" means that this personal God has lost personal interest . . . a desperate state of affairs; out of favour; out of Mind; the soul's Waifage.

There are those who bear bad luck with courage and even gaiety provided they are bearing it in company; but who get an obsession (which seems indeed to be borne out by fact) that they have the bad luck to be *isolated* in their bad luck, and all the rest of their friends have either constant good luck or else bad luck which suddenly comes right. They are fully aware, by reading and report, that millions exist whose luck is far worse than their own. But this is no final consolation, though they honestly try to make it so by reasoning; convinced that if they were once rescued from this obstinate outlawry, the spell dispelled, they would be free then to long for equal good luck for all their friends, and even endeavour their hardest to bring it about. They long fiercely for a way to luck, that capricious slip of a kingdom, as men long for a way to the new moon.

It is so lovely to be a favourite; royalty's favourite who can do no wrong; Piers Gaveston, George Villiers, Antinous, Sarah Churchill; lovely, too, to be a race-horse and favourite for the Derby, the Gold Cup or the St. Leger. Here is a newspaper cutting of an incident which occurred last summer:

### SWALLOW COLLIDES WITH RACE-HORSE

A remarkable incident occurred on Saturday while the St. Leger favourite was being given a mile and a half gallop. A swallow collided with the filly striking her just below the eye. The swallow was killed and the favourite's trainer is to have it stuffed as a memento. The filly escaped with a slight scar.

I had a feeling, when I read this, that something was faintly wrong about it . . . though I could not quite put my finger on the exact symptom: as though the tale of David and Goliath had happened in the way one might sadly have expected it to happen, and reported with the caption: "Boy Stone-slinger Killed by Giant".

If the outcome of the collision between the swallow and the race-horse had been reversed, if the race-horse were killed and

stuffed and presented to the Ornithologists' Club, that would have been news with a point worth recording, having the authentic miracle flavour of the small and weak incredibly victorious in collision with the huge and the strong; otherwise, where would lie the point for the reader in hearing that a race-horse, pursuing its normal life, had inadvertently killed a swallow who had had the bad luck to be flying in its path? "That isn't *news*," one would argue, "that's dog-bites-man, not man-bites-dog." But it was patiently explained to me that the race-horse was the *favourite* and therein lay the point. I'm afraid I still could not quite see the slightly macabre point in having the swallow stuffed. And turning up Matthew x. 29, I realized once more that the reassurances in the Gospels should not always be taken too literally.

My Ishmael period when I paced the Rope-Walk among the cats because I had no bedroom curtains, lasted just under three weeks. Eventually, we were sitting round Corderoy's table at an informal house-warming lunch when: "A man has come with some curtains, and he says shall he hang them now or would you rather he went and came back again?" As though any man who came to do a domestic job nowadays were ever likely to come back again! Certainly no guest was welcomed with food and drink and love and whoopee and clarion, as I welcomed that curtain man.

Then, and then only, I sent for my Hiraz rug. It was shaken out so that the light caught the breathless burnished folds of the unpatterned part round the intricate stained-glass design of the centre. It was this flaming chestnut background which, more even than the rest, made me think of my rug as perfection. Reverently it was laid on the floor. I gazed at it and thought it too wonderful to be true that I should be living all my future days with anything as flawless; that I might gaze and gaze, and look away again and perhaps go out or go into the sitting-room where there were visitors and then return, and it would still be there, not a treasure in a museum, but my rug, in use all the time, my rug in my own home, the most glorious rug in the whole world.

I gazed and gazed and looked away and read a few pages and then I looked again, and our marmalade cat was being sick on the flamy chestnut part where it was plain and perfect.

I did not behave well; I did not behave particularly badly.

"THE CAT SAT ON THE MAT"

I knew I should never again look at my rug without seeing first a blemish and then the rest. I can remember that was what I kept on saying at first; that was what I dwelt on: my wild disappointment because it had been *marred*, not because its value was destroyed. Marred; nothing could ever put that right. I believe I did carry on a bit, but I had the sense to send at once for an expert on rugs; he came and had a look and promised me that their process of cleaning would so effectually remove the stain that I should not know where it had happened. I did not believe him. A week later it came back so very nearly almost restored to perfection, that everybody surrounding me was relieved and cheerful about it. They still assert, whether truthfully or merely to comfort the stricken I cannot tell, that the mark is wholly invisible and that if I say otherwise I must be a victim of auto-suggestion.

We did not lay it on the floor again, but hung it on a panel of the wall. Few better examples exist of carefully shutting the stable door after the horse has been stolen. I can see it on first waking in the morning and just before switching off my lamp at night, as well as all the other times while moving about my bedroom or when I bring friends in to show them my glorious rug. It arouses unbounded admiration. And still, I swear I cannot help it, still I see the mark first and then the rest of the rug; it has ceased to be a symbol of perfection, but it is a very nice rug, a very nice rug indeed; I am lucky to have it.

If Tips had been essentially my own little cat, loving me fondly, jumping in my lap in preference to all other laps, running to meet me with Josephine's delighted little trills of welcome, then naturally after the first shock I would easily have realized that a live cat was better than a dead rug; and that no rug, however perfect, could be important compared with a furry little barrel of life trampling on my chest, eyes bright and dark and huge, that mysterious purr vibrating with such effortless strength through the small soft body. I can imagine myself caressing the dear affectionate little animal while absurdly murmuring into those pricked cocky white-tipped ears that it did not matter at all . . . Tips was not to mind . . . horrid old rug, poor little pussikins, wazzums sick? . . . there, there now!

However, as this ideal relationship had never existed between Tips and myself, as he was always rather off-hand with me and inclined to roll in the other direction, short legs a-straddle, backside swaying, determined on independent exploration of worlds in

which I could have no share, it took a little longer for my sense of proportion to function. Nevertheless, even left objectively outside and beyond his small warm breathing circle, it struck me soon enough for self-respect that the marmalade cat who sat on the mat—(it-is-a-good-cat. Yes, but-it-was-a-good-mat)—had accidentally administered a stinging and timely reproof to my returning temptation once more to adhere to a piece of property and let my fancy dwell on its perfection till I raised it to an extravagant symbol. I had been in danger, and Tips had been the instrument of rescue; that Hiraz rug, in my mind, had become a focal point, my compensation to myself for the incendiary bomb which had destroyed all the rest of my possessions. Yet who was I to say how or when I should be compensated, or if indeed the Big Idea allowed loss in property to be met by some equivalent restoration? And though I rather object to having a Child's First Primer hanging on my wall instead of a Persian rug, I can appreciate in a detached and faintly rueful sort of way the spectacle of Tips, oblivious of his past social lapse and oblivious of his own moral significance, fiercely screwed round, burrowing his nose deeply in the effort to clean the more inaccessible portions of his long tawny fur ("Oh Tips darling, *do* leave that bit and clean the white where it *shows!*")

I have had only one slight lapse since then, into the desire for acquiring possessions deliberately for possession's sake. One's delight in a felicitous gift at a felicitous moment is a different matter, and does not need valuable rugs spoilt in order to eradicate it. On my last birthday, when I was about half-way through this book, Dido gave me a china figure from the famous Meissener Monkey Orchestra to replace the monkey fiddler with the chipped hat which had stood on the mantelpiece of my old sitting-room in Albany. It was not until the newcomer was set up in the same place dominating the room, that I noticed with delight that it was the trumpeter of the band, bravely swaggering in his plum-coloured coat and flowered knee-breeches. The trumpeter of "Trumpet Voluntary"; here was certainly my mascot. No harm in all that, so far. But next door to my hairdresser was an antique shop displaying more members of the Monkey Orchestra, and another shop in King Street had a few as well; and I began to hang round them, make tentative and tenuous enquiries, finger the idea of what fun it would be to add, say, the 'cellist to the trumpeter . . . and then the cymbal-player . . . and then perhaps in time to own a quintet . . . and adding a few more, one by one, by windfall

and industry and friends-clubbing-together-for-Christmas-and-birthday and by that extra third-serial-rights-for-an-anthology-from-America and by wishful thinking, I might gradually and almost imperceptibly collect enough to justify the purchase of the conductor himself, arms outstretched with baton, flowing white wig . . . They could all stand on the mantelpiece each playing his own instrument; it would be the most absorbing pastime to arrange and rearrange them—

—Then I came round. Without help from Tips this time. So perhaps the germ was getting less virulent; perhaps I was beginning to learn. "So you're at it again," I remarked grimly. Fortunately, no material transaction had as yet taken place, and the trumpeter still stands solitary on the mantelpiece, sounding his voluntary: The Trumpet Voluntary which for me will always declare the celebration of life.

I have tried to make it the theme of this book. I wish it could have been more clear and shining. Nevertheless, by the willow-herb rioting unsubdued among the London ruins; by the spontaneous eagerness that lit up Esmond's face for the cat and kitten he could not see, playing in the warm sunshine he could only feel, defeating fear and darkness and helplessness; by the covenant of the rainbow spanning the sky over the horned skull lying derelict in the lane; by the blaze of vitality crackling through Van Gogh's painting, and the reassuring strength of the Angel's clasp supporting Jacob, triumphant over weariness and a fainting heart; by the cat who sat on the mat and so in words of one syllable repeated an old lesson against idolatry, and by that other cat wicked and buoyant and beautiful, at a Y.W.C.A. somewhere in the North, carelessly bringing forth a prodigal supply of kittens exceeding any possible demand for more and more life; by the little carroty boy hunted with stinging-nettles and suspected of money-grubbing, till the green-leaf discovery that saving meant to him not dead coin but a living symbol, the end of the war and the return of his father; by the life-givers pouring their wheat and wine through our days, lifting us on the way, unconsciously vanquishing the life-takers; by the normality of an evening walk taken because a shaggy little white dog always expects it, reassurance over uncertainty; and reassurance again by Alec crossing the Atlantic in discomfort and danger simply for us to realize that living friendship still endured, combating our waifage feeling of a world indifferent; by the bright gleam of Churchill's speeches at the moment whenever we



## TRUMPET VOLUNTARY

most needed them, dispelling panic and loneliness; by all the tiny instances and jewelled fragments shaken into the kaleidoscope of each amazing day, life mutinous and irrepressible, with urchin gesture and slangy repartee, life answers back.

Banishment and exile alone have not yet received their full answer; because the glimpse of sanctuary brought to us by two foreign boys happy for a brief while fooling round on the Thames, could only be counted as respite. The final answer to banishment can be no less than home-coming. But perhaps I was not too foolishly sanguine in recognizing the significance of that answer on its way, when three years after death's arrogant ascendancy, I could lie in the extravagant October sunshine on a quiet curve of yellow beach in the West of England and see a line of blunt-nosed invasion barges advance in implacable formation nearer and nearer—

—Yet know surely that what might have been nightmare itself come true: "We shall fight them on the beaches"—was now no more than a light-hearted rehearsal of invasion's menace swung into reverse. And I watched the three infants standing like baby penguins sparsely spread out on that empty stretch of beach a yard or two above where the little waves broke along the edge of England, and then I watched them scampering confidently along to welcome and mingle with Combined Operations, pleased but not specially excited, for to them this was just another invasion, and they the self-constituted Reception Committee. I watched, and I thought that here was final evidence that multitudinous death in 1940 and down the years, desperately urgent, gallant, confused, has been vindicated by this simplification at last to three English children able to start a fine October morning with the little extra fun of an invasion on their beach.

THE END



